Levent Yilmaz

Baydöner

“ I saw an opportunity to bring traditional delicacies to the Turkish market. ”

COUNTRY	Turkey
INDUSTRY	Consumer
YEAR SELECTED	2012
PARTNER	Feridun Tunçer
WEBSITE	www.baydoner.com

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Iskender doner, a dish of thinly cut grilled meat served with hot tomato sauce and yogurt over pita bread, is a favorite in Turkey's traditional restaurants and family dining rooms alike. In 2006, serial entrepreneurs Levent Yilmaz and Feridun Tuncer recognized a lack of casual dining restaurants offering Turkish cuisine in the shopping centers opening around the country. They founded Baydoner ("Mr. Doner") to offer consumers high-quality iskender doner at fast food prices. Since the launch of its first restaurant in 2007, Baydoner has expanded to more than 40 restaurants, including over 15 franchises, across 25 cities in Turkey. The market has taken to their concept: each year, Baydoner serves millions of customers. Baydoner has the potential to become a leading international Turkish restaurant brand.

The key to Baydoner's success is not just its secret doner recipe, but the quality standards upheld across all of its restaurants. For less than US$10 per person, customers can count on being served quality iskender doner by attentive waiters in a welcoming restaurant setting. By limiting the menu to six items-–iskender doner, four side options, and a traditional Turkish desert of künefe-–and ordering in bulk for all its stores, Baydoner can use top ingredients and still offer full meals for an average of US$8.50. Baydoner recently opened its first restaurant outside Turkey, in Erbil, Iraq.

Growing up with modest means in Izmir, Turkey, Levent and Feridun took to entrepreneurship early in life. As a child, Levent sold cold sodas at summer soccer games. While pursuing a degree in Pharmaceutical Science from Ege University, he started a business printing the university logo on sweatshirts and selling them to students. This entrepreneurial spirit earned Levent a job with Feridun in 1993. A veterinary medicine major in college, Feridun had started a home disinfectant company and needed a sales manager. Over the next decade they started a series of businesses, the last of which supplied food to the U.S. Army in Iraq. When the U.S. started to withdraw its forces from Iraq, the entrepreneurs returned to Izmir looking for inspiration for their next venture.

The two recognized an opportunity in the shopping centers opening up around Turkey. Having grown up in families where dining out was not an option, they decided to open affordable iskender doner restaurants in middle-class malls. In 2006, the duo invested their savings and registered the Baydoner brand. Determined to keep prices competitive with the fast food chains popular in mall food courts, they spent six months evaluating various options for suppliers, logistics, storage, and quality control. In Baydoner, Levent and Feridun believe they have a business that can transform the restaurant industry in Turkey and compete on an international scale.