



At Blue Pumpkin, adapting to thrive

Mon, 20 February 2017 [Matthieu de Gaudemar](#)

Blue Pumpkin, which began as a Siem Reap-based family business in 2000, has grown into one of the country's most-recognised brands. The Post's Matthieu de Gaudemar sat down with Eloi Courcoux, CEO of Meas Development Holding, which owns and operates the cafe and bakery chain, as well as other international franchises, to discuss the challenges of operating in a more crowded market.

What is the state of Cambodia's food & beverage market?

The market today is changing and the competition is fierce. There are many companies and many brands already operating here so we need to professionalise ourselves. We arrived two and a half years ago in Cambodia to take over a family business with the mission to reorganise and restructure this business into a group, and that is where we are right now.

What challenges has the brand faced?

You always need to reinvent yourself in this business. The fact that Blue Pumpkin has existed since 2000 means we've had to go through some turbulences and we had to face some challenges. But now we've already been through that, relative to a lot of our competitors that have not yet had so many years of experience. We know that we are running a marathon, not a race, and unfortunately, a lot of our competitors are not thinking of the long term and that is one of our differences.

Having said that, when other brands came in to Cambodia, Blue Pumpkin had to adapt.

The first few years, Blue Pumpkin was very clinic-like, white and bright to reassure the customer about the safety and hygiene of our products. Now we are trying to bring more colour to our stores and bring different materials like marble and wood to bring more warmth and try to make people more at ease in our store.

What is the current focus of your business strategy?

We are mostly focusing on quick-service restaurants and we are targeting the Cambodian middle class, which we see is growing. And then because we are also in the airports, we are also targeting tourists. We have seen a huge change of tourists in Cambodia. Now, most of the tourists are Asian and a big part of them are Chinese. So we are expanding our Asian and Chinese products. There is a great diversity in our menu and we are going more and more Asian in tastes.

How do you hope to stand out from the competition?

The idea for us is to be able to make sure we can guarantee the quality of service, but also the quality of our production, and so we produce most of our items ourselves. For Blue

We now have a total of 15 Blue Pumpkin stores in Cambodia, including four at the airports, but we are developing internationally and we are going to open a franchise this month in Mandalay airport in Myanmar. We have also been approached to open franchises in Malaysia, Thailand and Laos.

What are you offering franchisees?

As a franchiser we promise to assist the franchisee to develop from helping identify the right location to proposing the right design or right product mix based on the location. The last development we did was to open a franchise location in November at the check-in area of Phnom Penh airport, which is very popular.

We will also assist in the production. If it is in Phnom Penh or Siem Reap, we can easily produce fresh every day. When it is outside, we deliver with refrigerated trucks and a frozen range of product bases that can be assembled locally. We also propose support for marketing and training.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



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