

Ghana to get Vida e Caffé stores

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What the Cape Town Vida e Caffé franchise calls its "big push this year" will see the operation exporting its concept coffee shops to Ghana.



The company, which already operates in Angola, says its concept is to bring a slice of European coffee culture onto African streets.

"We believe we can be first to market with this type of concept, as we were in SA. We'd be silly not to look at it; a lot of people have done well there," managing director Grant Dutton said.

Retailers in the food and beverage sector are extending their presence on the continent in the hope of cashing in on a burgeoning middle class, whose disposable income is rising. Urbanisation and the move to formalised retail markets have also led to a demand for modern goods and services.

He says that while rich pickings are available, these must be tempered with the reality of doing business in Africa, as corruption, regulation and bureaucracy does exist.

"Angola is a great market for us - there are a lot of Portuguese roots, the guys are paid well, they all understand coffee. It is a tough place to do business though. There are issues regarding duties, customs procedures and bringing in produce, so it does hinder operational capabilities. We have partnered with a master franchisee, to help negate the risks," Dutton said.

Life and coffee

Vida e Caffé, which is Portuguese for "life and coffee", has four stores in Mauritius and is also expanding into Botswana this year.

The brand started in November 2001 with its first store in Kloof Street, Cape Town and has since expanded to 70 stores around the country - half of which are corporately owned and the other half franchised.

"Our franchise model is a bit different because we run the stores for our franchisees. It's attractive because it's quite a low

entry point into franchising compared with other brands and you don't have to give up your day job. It's also turnkey so we build the store and run it as well," Dutton said.

Locally, growth-focused Vida e Caffé sees room for expansion in Gauteng.

"There are a lot of locations where we haven't put stores," Dutton said.

The corporate environment is another avenue where the group is making inroads. It recently setup a Vida e Caffé in Standard Bank's head office in central Johannesburg.

The coffee-seller, which imports its beans from South America, has a boutique roastery located below its head office in Woodstock, Cape Town.

Innovation is key to the brand and the coffee company says it is developing its iPhone and Android app to include its loyalty programme and a "beat the queue system" where customers can log on, order, pay and then simply collect their coffee in store.

"Our brand partnerships are important. We have an in-house magazine called Obrigado. We've taken a very cool, niche, cult brand and rolled it out over multiple locations, it's pivotal for us to preserve this as we grow. From a marketing point of view, we know we're doing well when people say lets go for a Vida, not just a coffee," Dutton said.

Vida e Caffé would also like to expand into Australia and the US and extend its footprint in London where it already has two stores.

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