

SA-made Kombo King set for retail rollout following Vumela investment

Entrepreneurs Zitulele KK Combi and Ari Jacobson have launched their patented deep-fryer technology Kombo King to South African retailers, after securing investment from the Vumela Fund, established by FNB and Edge Growth.







Already introduced at Pick n Pay, King Pie and Engen's new convenience concept store, the hygienic, ventless fryer product is now set for wider market roll-out.

After selling the successful Cape Town-based entrepreneurial venture, Master Currency, to Bidvest in 2007, Combi and Jacobson reunited with the launch of a R1bn listed property fund in 2011. Fast forward, and the pair saw a gap in the market for quick, consistent and healthy fried food after a trip to China by Combi.

The result was Kombo King fryers, already proven through various blue-chip clientele, is set to expand further into the retail sector with its automated solution that can fry pre-packaged, par-cooked or fresh meals without needing expensive ventilation infrastructure to remove odours.

Hygiene and convenience top of mind

Kombo King's original ventless and odourless deep-frying products are designed, patented and manufactured in South Africa, and ranks 9th in its classification field for applied patents across Europe and the US. The solution stands out as a strong innovation-driving presence in South Africa, with the vast majority of patent applications originating from US and European manufacturers.

With hygiene protocols top-of-mind more than ever, corporates and consumers have a greater hygiene guarantee expectation. And this is as applicable to convenience foods as it is to hand sanitiser at the entrance to every establishment. This is a factor that drove pre-Covid conversations with major retailers, alongside the other benefits such as less oil, and faster cooking.

According to the founders, the Kombo King fryers were developed in response to the growing demand for convenience foods at an affordable price point, but that does not compromise on quality. "Fried food is a staple in South Africa with healthy options far and few between. Our technology requires no extraction, has the added element of speed and uses reduced oil so the end product is both healthy and convenient without compromising on taste," says Combi and Jacobson.



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Additionally, the portable product eliminates high fixed costs for retailers by using single-phase electricity, with "savings of 60% on operational costs and 57% on electrical costs when compared to traditional fryers", according to the company.

The closed, automated system also adds a safety measure for employees operating the product, decreasing exposure to

hot oil as well as the need for extensive training. Automated recipes ensure all foods are consistent in quality and taste, while the breakeven rate for retailers is 10 x packets of fried chips a day.

Attractive investment

The health and safety benefits of the Kombo King products, as well as the fact that they're designed and manufactured locally, were key factors that drove the Vumela Fund investment.

Vuyiswa Nzimande, principal at Edge Growth and lead dealmaker explains, "Consumer-centric product offerings are key to attracting customers in a highly competitive convenience food market. We view Kombo King fryers as an enabler to its clients to differentiate themselves in terms of quality, consistency and speed of service while increasing the client's value proposition."

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