

Marcel's Frozen Yoghurt: Serving up success for 30 years

 By [Lauren Hartzberg](#)

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The first Marcel's Frozen Yoghurt store opened in Stellenbosch in 1989, serving up a healthier alternative to the frozen desserts available at the time using an engaging over-the-counter service format.



Source: Supplied

The stiff competition and sheer variety that exists among food service providers in SA's metropolitan cities today was not the case then, and international franchise brands were few and far between.

Despite mounting competition in the food and beverage space, Marcel's is alive and kicking 32 years later. The company has a collection of 26 corporate and franchised stores, a growing distribution network of packaged retail products supplied to at least seven African countries, and it also manufactures and supplies private label products to major SA retailers.

Marcel's credits product quality as key to standing the test of time. The brand's products have won over 50 awards at the SA Dairy Championships, claiming the coveted Qualité Award eight times, and making history in 2015 as the first product outside of the cheese and butter industry to receive this award.

Like many other companies in the food and beverage industry at present, Marcel's is navigating its way through Covid-19 restrictions and their impact on consumer behaviour, but its vision to become the leading manufacturer of frozen dessert products remains intact.

We chatted to Marcel's managing director Nicole Westvig, who shared her optimism about the future of the brand as it eyes growth nationally and abroad, and her views on remaining relevant in a competitive marketplace.

■ For a business that's older than 30 years, what do you believe are the factors that have kept Marcel's relevant throughout these years, particularly in the competitive food & beverage space?



Marcel's managing director Nicole Westvig. Source: Supplied

Consistency is key. In 1989, Marcel's Gourmet Frozen Yoghurt was first introduced to the South African market with the opening of its first store in Stellenbosch, Western Cape. Marcel's has always had an innate commitment to using premium, all-natural ingredients in its recipe development, despite the costs. The integrity of the product remains at the core of the brand and its numerous awards and accolades attest to this.

Recipient of a South African Dairy Championships Qualité Award, Marcel's Gourmet Frozen Yoghurt products continue to be recognised as one of the finest dairy products in the country.

Can you tell us a bit more about the packaged retail products side of the business?

Our product range and offering ranges from soft-serve and finished products available at our Marcel's outlets, and our retail products can also be found in most leading retail outlets such as Spar, Pick n Pay, OK and Checkers stores, in 1L and 175ml.

Marcel's is probably best known for its English Toffee flavour, with the other three standard flavours of Strawberry, Chocolate and Vanilla. But over the years we've developed several innovative new flavours and products. Most recently we launched a range of preservative-free drinking yoghurts and frozen yoghurt cakes.



Source: Supplied

■ What do you see as the key challenges and opportunities at present for your industry?

There's no doubt that the South African retail market is in distress, but the global Covid-19 pandemic, and the lockdown regulations imposed on the country this year has seen the hospitality and retail industry take hard knocks. The closing down of popular restaurants and food outlets bears testament to the challenging climate facing this sector. It's no surprise, then, that seasonal products/categories such as the frozen dessert industry are bearing the brunt of these repercussions.

As a brand, there is vast potential for national expansion, with exciting developments underway to infiltrate the international market soon.

Despite the dire year the retail sector has had, we are proud to have opened two new franchised stores in the past six

months and have acquired a second brand (with multiple stores) to compete in the 'healthier choice' food space.

■ **Since Marcel's runs a combination of corporate and franchised stores, what value do you see in the franchise model?**

A) The benefit of owning our own stores is that not only do we interact with our customers directly, this enables us to gain market analysis, keep an eye on trends and allows us to adapt to change quite swiftly.

B) On the flip side, the advantage of owning franchised stores allows the brand to gain momentum through expansion, whilst reinvesting into the business in areas such as production facilities, new product development and marketing. We strive to consistently deliver on the customer experience across all stores. As a franchisor, we insist on a hands-on approach from our franchisees.



Source: Supplied

■ **What are some of the key consumer trends that you've picked up, which Marcel's is aiming to tap into?**

We believe in our product integrity and don't ever veer off for the sake of trends. Apart from having a very innovative new product development (NPD) team that continues to set the bar very high for natural flavours, we tend to stick with what we know works.

To give you a prime example, in 2012 South Africa experienced an influx of new entrants to the frozen yoghurt market with the aggressive rollout of self-service retail concepts, posing a threat to the Marcel's brand.

At the time, approximately 80 new frozen yoghurt stores opened across the country. And although the concept of self-service was a novelty, Marcel's continued to serve its customers over the counter as to not compromise the overall customer experience, ensuring the delivery of quality products to our customers as well as service.

However today the landscape is very different and Marcel's Frozen Yoghurt has reclaimed its position as the market leader.



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▣ **What do you think the next few years holds in store for Marcel's?**

The silver lining of this pandemic (we like to be optimistic) is that we've had to strategise and relook at our business in a way that's forced us to streamline efficiencies. I believe that we are now even better equipped going forward as we continue our growth through brand awareness, increased national footprint, and in so doing, gaining a larger market share.

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