Leba Restaurant, Budapest, Hungary

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PLANTBASED

Prologue

I am looking for an investor for Leba Restaurant, a vegan bistronomy style business, the operation of which I already started on a “pop-up” basis in 2023. I am looking for a finance only investor who would leave the management of the business to me, as I have a clear vision on how this restaurant will work successfully.

The idea is to open a restaurant with a sophisticated, plant-based cuisine. I started to build and spread the awareness of the brand. I invited top Hungarian chefs to participate in my “pop-up” events in order to gain more interest and increase publicity through their reputation.

Unfortunately, without a permanent location I cannot organize as many events as I would like, because the “pop-up” based events come with logistical and financial challenges. Securing a permanent, own location would allow me to organize such vegan fine dining events frequently.

I invite you to join me on this journey of creating something unique.

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The vision, mission and goal

1. To promote passion for a Healthy Lifestyle: My goal by opening a vegan restaurant is to show people the importance of healthy eating and the focus on well-being. By offering healthy, nutritious vegan dishes, I aim to help people lead healthier lives.

2. Environment and Sustainability: I am committed to protecting our environment, and to contribute to sustainability in the interest of the longevity of our planet. My vegan restaurant will contribute to making the food industry more environmentally friendly by using sustainable ingredients and minimizing waste.

3. Delicious and Creative Vegan Dishes: I want to demonstrate to people that vegan food can be not only healthy but also incredibly tasty and creative. My menu will feature dishes that guests have never tasted before, in order to convince them that vegan cuisine can indeed be diverse.

4. To Create a Community Space: It's important to me to build a sense of community and bring people together. My vegan restaurant will be a place where people can meet, chat, and share their experiences about the vegan lifestyle. I want my guests to feel at home.

5. Creative Marketing and Education: My goal is to educate people about the benefits of the vegan lifestyle. Through marketing campaigns and educational programs, I'll help persuade people that vegan dining can contribute to their health and to the protection of our planet.

6. Integration of Local Culture and Flavors: My restaurant will incorporate local culture and flavors, allowing people to explore and enjoy local vegan cuisine as well.

7. To support Animal Welfare: Through the vegan restaurant, I aim to promote respect for animals and ethical food production.

Introduction

A little bit about me, the idea and how it has all started

Regarding my professional background, I worked 18 years at the Restaurant Cyrano, in Budapest, Hungary. I started as a busboy, I would wash up or help with dishing the plates, I helped where help was needed. But I moved up on the ladder quite quickly and I became the Manager at only 23 years of age.

In 2016 I moved to the UK with my family starting as a waiter in a casino, after 1 month I was responsible for their private events. After 6 months of acclimatization to my new home country, I applied for a position as Deputy General Manager in a restaurant in Oxford.

I managed the Oxford branch of Banana Tree restaurant chain on my own. At the time we were the newest branch and the most successful one. The restaurant was hovering between the 8^{th}-10^{th} position on TripAdvisor's recommendation list.
This is where I realized that there is a huge demand for the vegan dishes. This is where I started thinking about an idea of having my own vegan restaurant.

In 2019 I was a manager in a 1 Michelin Gastropub in Bagnor, where I was hired to set the standards for the service. As I had no opportunity here to materialize my ideas, I decided that I needed a break to get my thoughts in order and with that, I changed my job and left the catering industry for a short while.

It was 2022 when I decided it was time to start the Leba journey, the concept of which has been shaping in my head for a few years by then. I even changed my diet to plant-based and I had been vegan for over a year, which helped me understand even more about the gap in the market. I put together a business plan which I shared with Zoltán Fehér, the owner of Cyrano, the restaurant I started my career at, who encouraged me with my concept.

This year, thanks to the success of my pop-up events I was invited to be a part of a round table conversation at the SIRHA Expo, which is the most significant international HoReCa and Retail Show of the CEE region. In addition, I was approached by members of the Culinary Institute of Europe, who expressed their interest of working together on the education of their students, they would like professional practice placements in my restaurant, as soon as there is a permanent location. They are enthusiastic about my vision as well.

I am also receiving emails from abroad from chefs saying they would like to work with me, they would like to participate in a pop-up dinner under Leba's brand.
I am proud to say that after contacting a Michelin starred vegetarian/ vegan restaurant in Vienna, Austria, we are now planning our collaboration in the next year.

Leba project

In 2017 I started thinking about this idea, after browsing websites in the subject. I also experienced it in my everyday life, it was obvious that the demand for veganism is growing rapidly.

Most of the restaurants have realized they need to have plant-based dishes on their menus in order to be inclusive and to invite a wider audience. All the big retailers have introduced their own vegan brand and have started to sell plant-based goods (e.g. vegan cosmetics, clothing, etc.).

I wanted to prove that a perfect menu does not require animal ingredients. I strongly believe this is a more sophisticated and more convincing way to raise awareness to the radical demonstrations.

Inspired by some previously triumphant examples, I thought it would be useful to start with some pop-up events. They are ideal for building a brand, for raising awareness, and I have to say it worked.

In January 2023 (for veganuary) I organized the first four dinner events with Oliver Heiszler, a Michelin starred chef and Csaba Adam who is the top vegetarian chef in Hungary. Both had two nights each to cook a 5 course vegan tasting menu. The venue was the Restaurant Cyrano.

We served more than a hundred guests, which I think for a new project was a big success to have so many people having responded and attended.

I invited the Chairman of the Hungarian Vegan Society (short: MAVEG) to give a 10-15 minute introductory speech about veganism. I do think education is very important. We have grown a very close friendship, he backs my project up in every possible way.

I organized all the dinner events by myself, I found and contacted the chefs, I found and selected the venues, I did all the marketing, social media posts on my own. I even organized the first events remotely, from the UK, it was challenging to say the least. I only travelled to Hungary a couple of days before the dinners to finalize the details.

The next series of events took place in May 2023. This time I invited two other chefs, one of them has a Green Michelin star. The chefs cooked only once, so there were only two dinners. Both events were fully booked, which means we served 60 people in total. The spaces filled up in a couple of days after opening the booking page, I didn't even have to invest in advertisement.

Laszlo, the Chairman of MAVEG was of course present again to open the evenings.

We always ask the guests at the beginning of the dinners if they were vegans or not and I am delighted that actually most of the guests are non-vegans, which proves that people are interested in the plant-based cuisine.

In January 2024 (for veganuary again) I had organized three more dinners. One of the chefs was Csaba Adam again, alongside two other chefs. These dinners were fully booked again, so we served 90 guests in three nights.

The latest dinner was on the International Women's day in March, it was fully booked as well. This was my 10th dinner.

Target audience

The target audience for the vegan lifestyle can be diverse, but generally, it aims to appeal to the following groups:

1. *Animal Lovers and Ethical Vegans:* Many vegans adopt this lifestyle because they oppose the exploitation and to the suffering of animals through the food industry due to animal farming, and animal testing. They stand by the rights and welfare of animals and shape their diets accordingly.

2. *Environmentally Conscious Individuals:* The vegan lifestyle is popular among environmentally conscious people because animal agriculture and animal product production contribute to environmental issues such as greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation. Vegans believe that a diet that is free from animal products can contribute to making the planet more sustainable.

3. *Health-Conscious Individuals*: Among those choosing a vegan diet are people who do so for health reasons. Research suggests that a properly planned vegan diet can be balanced and healthy, offering certain health benefits such as lower cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure, and reduced risk of certain chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

4. *Those with Food Sensitivities or Intolerances:* Some people opt for a vegan lifestyle because consuming dairy or meat products is problematic for them due to food allergies or intolerances.

5. *Religious or Spiritual Reasons:* Some religious or spiritual traditions and practices support the vegan diet, emphasizing abstention and respect for animals. For example, vegetarianism or the vegan lifestyle is prevalent in some Buddhist and Hindu religions.

6. *Scientific or Ethical Reasons:* Many scientists and intellectuals choose the vegan lifestyle because they believe it is a healthy and sustainable choice based on their convictions or available scientific evidence.

Those interested in or following the vegan lifestyle can be extremely diverse, and they may have various motivations for choosing this lifestyle. Additionally, veganism continues to gain popularity, with more and more people showing interest due to concerns about animals, the environment, and health.

Leba, as a brand

Leba is a word play; it is Abel, my son's name, backwards. Only later, I discovered that it actually means "loveable" in the Hebrew language. I thought I could not have thought of a better name than this. The Logo that I use was hand written by my son in 2018.

The menu

There a couple of options for the menu. I found some suitable staff members already, and I have to say there are a couple of young chefs who believe in the plant-based future. I was lucky to have worked with a few of them in the past. I also have a meeting in the pipeline with a chef who currently works in a Michelin starred vegetarian/vegan restaurant, he is a big fan of my progress so far and is keen to work with me.

My aim is to find the right chef who can set the tone of Leba's kitchen; I need someone who believes in the plant-based cuisine, and want to grow with me, hand in hand.

Kitchen and service

Vegan bistronomy

Combining the terms bistrot and gastronomy, the name alone almost says it all: bistronomy is all about bringing together the fresh, quality ingredients, simple but delicious recipes, and warm laid-back atmosphere of traditional bistros with the imperative discipline and technique of haute cuisine gastronomy.

In the early 90s, Yves Camdeborde, then a promising young Chef learning the ropes in the kitchens of a Parisian palace, decided to open his first restaurant La Régalade in the south end of Paris. Serving excellent bistro dishes at a very sweet price, his intention was to make fine dining affordable and accessible, "to democratize haute cuisine" for his gourmet customers. The concept was born, baptized bistronomy by food critic Stephane Demorand, and its success was immediate.

Planned opening hours:

Monday:	Closed
Tuesday:	Closed
Wednesday:	12pm-3pm and 6pm-10pm
Thursday :	12pm-3pm and 6pm-10pm
Friday:	12pm-3pm and 6pm-10pm
Saturday:	12pm-3pm and 6pm-10pm
Sunday:	12pm-3pm and 6pm-10pm

In the Summer days with longer daylight, I can also imagine breakfast served outdoors.

The plans for the opening

I believe, before the grand opening, two promotional dinners will be required, two soft openings, where we can test the food, the service all together, to make sure it all works well.

The first dinner would be for the vegan society, for fellow vegan entrepreneurs, to demonstrate our commitment to the cause. It would be a good opportunity for meeting new people from the vegan business circle and to make new connections. For the second dinner I would invite the press, a couple of Concierges of the leading hotels of Budapest who will be key in recommending our restaurant to foreign visitors, and probably a few influencers as well.

In the first month I would reprise the “pop-up” style by inviting guest chefs to cook for the public but this time in my own venue. For these events I would invite a Hungarian chef from the UK with a Green Michelin star and a Botswanan chef living in Poland who heard about the Leba project and approached me with an intent to host dinners based on the cuisine of the Sahara desert, which sounds very intriguing.

Hierarchy

Manager

I will handle the managerial tasks, which are as follows:

1. Customer Relations: Excellent customer service is number one priority at all times, I strive to provide a pleasant experience for my guests. It will be my responsibility to ensure this and to set the standards to follow by all staff.

2. Staffing matters: Selecting, training all new starters and keeping the staff motivated. I believe that a well-functioning team is the key to the restaurant's success.

3. Inventory and Cost Analysis: Together with the chef, continuously monitoring and managing the food inventory, aiming for efficient cost management. Working towards efficient procurement of ingredients and minimizing waste.

4. Menu Planning: Overseeing the development of the menu set out by the kitchen, taking seasons of the year, availability of ingredients, and guest preferences into account.

5. Marketing and Advertising: Developing and implementing the marketing strategy to promote the restaurant and to attract new customers by utilizing both online and offline marketing tools and maintaining relationships with returning customers.

6. Compliance with Health Regulations: Ensuring that the restaurant complies with food safety regulations and restaurant hygiene and occupational safety regulations in all aspects.

7. Financial Planning and Cost Control: Establishing and maintaining the financial plan and ensuring strict control of costs. Adhering to the budget and maximizing profit is my primary goal.

8. Building Relationships: In collaboration with the chef, establishing relationships with local food suppliers and other restaurants to support each other and develop mutually beneficial connections.

9. Regulations and Permits: Ensuring that the restaurant complies with all necessary regulations and possesses all required permits for operation.

10. Changes and Improvements: I am open to changes and continuous improvements to keep the restaurant fresh and competitive.

The Restaurant Manager position is versatile and holds a great responsibility, and I am committed to contributing to the successful operation and development of the restaurant with all my efforts.

Service staff

According to my experience, 30 seating is ideal. This is the number of guests that can be served at a high standard at any one time, whilst maintaining cost efficiency as well.

2 servers and a bartender is enough to serve a restaurant like that with a busboy on busy days. I would take part in serving the customers as well, as this is my passion and it is the best way to engage and develop a good relationship with the guests.

I would be happy to work with students, apprentices as well, I enjoy teaching unexperienced people and shape them to the way I know best.

For the uniform I would prefer all black, as it’s elegant, and understated.

The kitchen staff

Besides a well planned and prepared menu and an optimized seating system the following kitchen staff is also required: 1 Head Chefs, 3 cooks and one kitchen porter. During busy periods extra staff can be called in.

The Head Chef is responsible for the standards, plating, planning of the menu, and for the ordering of the ingredients.

Uniforms for the kitchen staff are white and black.

Cleaning

1 cleaner needed for mopping the restaurant every morning, clean the windows, hoovering, prepare the bathrooms for the daily operation. The floor staff would monitor all this during the shifts and act if needed.

Location

Budapest is a city that is extremely rich in cultural, historical and architectural values.

The city offers visitors a wealth of exciting sights and events. The gastronomy has also developed remarkably over the last 10 to 15 years.

The center of Budapest would the ideal location for the restaurant. This area is one of the most important tourist attractions in the city. With plenty of hotels and restaurants, it is a popular destination for tourists not only for staying but for visiting as well.

This also means that the restaurant would be easily accessible for both local and foreign visitors. The plant-based food culture is already more widespread in foreign countries, so we can expect tourists to be interested.

Market research, competition analysis

Leba would be unique as there is no casual dining, fine dining vegan restaurant in Budapest. There are other vegan/plant-based restaurants but they are mostly eateries, fast food type of restaurants.

In the world there are a couple renowned plant-based restaurants (with one or even more Michelin stars), but in this region the closest is in Vienna, Austria (the one that I have contacted and planning collaboration with).

Most of the restaurants have vegan dishes on the menu but the choices are very limited and not too interesting. Fully committed vegans will not eat in restaurants that offer dairy/meat products.

I have done an online research, with 200 participants. Based on the result of that there is indeed a demand for a good vegan restaurant, and people would travel even 20-30 kilometers to dine in such a place.

Marketing

Branding

Creating value is the primary consideration for paying customers. Emphasis should be placed on interviewing existing customers to determine:

- What influenced their decision to come to us.
- Where they heard about us (this is already a functioning channel)
- It is necessary to identify the types of existing customers and concentrate on similar segments.
- What innovations can help us acquire new customers and, more importantly, retain existing ones.

B, Online and offline marketing

Online marketing offers restaurants a great opportunity to attract potential customers and promote the restaurant. I already use several of the following with good results.

1. Social media presence: actively manage existing social media profiles, such as

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Pinterest. Share restaurant pictures, restaurant news, and respond to customer questions and feedback.

2. Food pictures and videos: high quality pictures and short videos of the restaurant's food The use of high quality images and short videos of the restaurant's food can help create an appetizing presentation of the food. Use this visual content in social media and on the website.

3. Website: Clear, user friendly website, where the menu or any changes of it can be easily found, along with the contact details of the restaurant. It should be updated regularly, always kept up to date. The website should always display the latest information.

4. Provide online reservation services or restaurant booking platforms. This will simplify the booking process for guests. This can be done by providing a reservation system for guests.

5. Continue to send out regular updates on special offers, events and menu changes.

6. Keep the restaurant's contact details, opening hours and reviews up-to-date. This will help ensure that you stay at the top of the rank in search engines.

To document our previous events I hired photographer László Barkányi, who has proven to be a reliable and respected professional. Apart from his professionalism and dedication during the event, he also assured me of his support for the concept of the Leba Restaurant. He allowed me to have access to an almost unlimited amount of quality photos for promotional materials.

Leba’s social media presence up to date:

Facebook 1209 followers
Instagram 496 followers
LinkedIn 43 followers (I have started to use LinkedIn just recently as I believe it is a very relevant platform for reaching decision makers in corporate life)

Suppliers, partners

We have heard a lot about the importance of sustainability, especially in the hospitality sector, where one of the key objectives is to minimize environmental impact. A key element of this is working with local producers. The shorter the journey of raw materials, the lower the impact on the environment and with that we also support local, small businesses.

Seasonality and the zero waste initiative are important aspects that need to be taken into account. A zero waste means minimizing the amount of waste and exploit raw materials as much as possible. It is not only beneficial from an environmental point of view but also financially and for cost-efficiency, as full use of raw materials has a positive impact on business results.

Building these relationships is a time-consuming task, and therefore it is important to start looking for them as soon as possible. It is expected that there will be products, raw materials and spices that cannot be sourced locally or nationally, so we must strive to find the most

optimal alternatives, such as the Hungarian-roasted, artisanal coffees or Hungarian spirits for example that are already available, e.g. Agárdi gin, rum or Opera gin.

Final thoughts

When I embarked on the adventures of the Leba Restaurant project, I knew exactly what I wanted to achieve, but after having great success with these dinner events, my goals and ideas have become even clearer.

Based on the feedback received from my guests, the professional attendees and the vegan community I strongly believe that I have started something unique; a project that stands out within the industry.

I have regular customers already and I am proud to say that whoever I reach out to regarding a possibility of a collaboration, they are more than happy to work with me and in fact, they feel honored.

With your help I would like to carry on working on providing exquisite culinary experiences to people who are committed to a healthier lifestyle and to be a pioneer in this within the ever growing vegan world.