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Cover Story

For 59-store Jimmy John's franchisee, path to success started with lunch

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Dan Vansteenburgh is in his third profession and seems to have found his fit. He started his career as a special education teacher, then worked for an information technology firm. Now he owns nearly 60 Jimmy John's franchises through his company Spin the Planet Enterprises.

Vansteenburgh was working in sales for the IT firm and tasked with buying lunch one day. His co-workers suggested Jimmy John's since it delivers. While looking at Jimmy John's website, he noticed a posting for franchisees and got curious, as the IT firm was struggling financially.

After consulting with his wife, he took the plunge.

"She had one condition — don't fail," Vansteenburgh said. "In August of 2001, I opened our first store in Roseville."

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Today he has 59 Jimmy John's restaurants in four states with 41 in Minnesota. He credits his success to a few ideas which may be relatively simple, but require discipline:

Whatever Jimmy John Liautaud, founder of the franchise, does with his stores, Vansteenburgh follows. Since Liautaud has skin in the game with his own stores, Vansteenburgh takes his ideas and methods seriously. In the back of each of Vansteenburgh's stores is his photo with an email address and phone number. Any of his roughly 1,100 employees can reach him with an idea or comment. He says he hears from employees about three to four times a week on average.

Last but not least, he still makes sandwiches here and there and works in the stores. "I'm not so important to not clean the sink," he said.

Locally, Vansteenburgh's best-performing stores are two he has in Eagan. He also owns locations in Wisconsin, New York and Massachusetts. He has about 10 locations in the Boston area and made a commitment to build 75 in and around Beantown.



NANCY KUEHN

Dan Vansteenburgh, CEO of Spin the Planet, said his two Eagan Jimmy John's locations are his best-performing stores.

"Boston is a college town," he said. "We'll stay open to 3 a.m. when they're studying ... more likely partying." He added his sandwiches are cheaper than other options for college kids. "You don't need two or three other people to go in on a pizza with you."

Vansteenburgh said he doesn't have any plans at this time to get into another franchise, in part because he knows this one well and likes it.

His favorite selections at Jimmy John's?

"I like the No. 4 [turkey breast with] bacon. I like the No. 10," which is a roast beef sandwich.

Spin the Planet

CEO: [Dan Vansteenburgh](#)

Headquarters: Oakdale

Year first franchise opened: 2001

States in: Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York and Massachusetts

Total employees: Roughly 1,100

Patrick Rehkamp

Data Reporter

*Minneapolis / St. Paul Business
Journal*

