

LARRY FLYNT TO EXPAND PORN EMPIRE WITH RESTAURANTS

Architectural Sketches Feature Sex Goddess Statuary; Waitresses Called 'Hustler Hunnies'

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By [Kate MacArthur](#)

CHICAGO (Adage.com) -- As Larry Flynt's porn empire continues to lose print circulation, the controversial publisher of *Hustler* magazine is further diversifying his holdings with plans to open a restaurant chain called Hustler Bar & Grille.



Initial design sketches provided by Hustler Bar & Grille show a restaurant interior with sex goddess statuary. Click to see [larger image](#).

A self-anointed “adult entertainment mogul and First Amendment advocate,” Mr. Flynt’s LFP company has signed a licensing agreement for undisclosed terms with Gerald Bernard Hospitality to run the operation. Mr. Flynt will have final approval of all plans and will make personal appearances at each restaurant opening.

This latest addition to Mr. Flynt’s business portfolio joins a dozen Hustler Hollywood retail stores, a handful of gentleman’s clubs, a Hustler Casino, 20 magazines, a dozen Web sites, mail-order sales, video production and cable and satellite TV operations.

100-plus item menu

The casual dining chain will be an homage to *Hustler* content, Larry Flynt’s brand of free speech advocacy and sports. Its 100-plus item menu will include fresh fish, pizzas, pasta, sandwiches, burgers and salads.

Described as “Hooters meets Hard Rock Cafe,” the concept is “very mainstream,” said Gerald Bernard Hospitality President Brad Saltzman. With no nudity or entertainment, “it really is a restaurant for all intents and purposes,” he said.

Except that the food will be served by Hustler Hunnies, wearing tight midriff-bearing T-shirts and short-shorts. *Hustler* centerfold models will make appearances to sign autographs.

Classier than McDonald's

Mr. Flynt said he accepts that the chain will immediately be compared to Hooters of America -- a restaurant chain known for its buxom waitresses in tight t-shirts and hot pants -- but insisted his restaurants won’t be a copy of any kind. “I expect it to be a class operation. We’re not going to be like McDonald’s.”

Mr. Saltzman approached LFP after seeing the success of Hooters, which is fast-approaching \$1 billion in restaurant sales. “When you look at a sexy concept like Hooters, there is no other competition,” he said. “I’ve been to Hooters once and I don’t think people go there for the food. If you have great food like a Cheesecake Factory with phenomenal service and an immaculately clean restaurant, add that with *Hustler* memorabilia and Larry Flynt memorabilia and you really have a winning concept.”

Mr. Saltzman concedes, however, that it won’t be the food that draws customers, at least at first. “The Hustler Hunnies will bring them in, but the food the cleanliness and the service will bring them back.”

'Huge market for pornography'

"It's not the craziest thing I've heard of if they don't try to compete with just Applebee's or Chili's or Hard Rock Cafe," said Bob Goldin, exec VP at restaurant consultant Technomic. "There's a huge market for pornography, sex-related book shops, gentleman's clubs, X-rated magazines and X-rated videos, and he's got a brand. Hooters is pretty PG-rated ... and Hustler is as an X-rated a brand if there ever was one."

Mr. Flynt admits he was "late" into the franchising business because he didn't think the brand "had a value that was significant." But after licensing the Hustler name for a nightclub, business at the club jumped 30%. Mr. Flynt was convinced.

Mr. Saltzman expects to have four units open next year in Las Vegas, San Diego, San Francisco and Arizona, with Miami following thereafter. If all goes well, he hopes to have 40 units within a decade, including international markets.

Like Hooters, the Hustler Bar and Grille is expecting 70% of its clientele to be men. Most of them are projected to be between ages 25 and 54 with a median income of \$28,000, but they won't necessarily be *Hustler* readers. "We're going to be a little more mainstream," said Mr. Saltzman, though "I don't think many families will go." The goal is an average unit volume target of \$4 million.

So far no marketing plans have been finalized, other than using a heavy dose of public relations and A-list star-studded grand openings. Mr. Saltzman plans to cross-market with hustler.com, the Hustler Hollywood erotic apparel stores and use out-of-home and radio media buys on shock-jock shows like Howard Stern's.

Hooters vs. Hustler

Mike McNeil, VP-marketing for Hooters of America, said he wasn't aware of the Hustler plans, but was adamant that his brand is very different from that of his new rival. "There's a huge difference between Hooters and *Hustler*," he said. "Female nudity is not part of our concept, and that's not a subtle distinction. If you compare us, clearly female sex appeal is a key ingredient of the Hooters concept, but we would argue it's of a socially acceptable variety a la *Sports Illustrated* or the NFL cheerleaders, that sort of thing. We're maybe somewhere between Hard Rock Cafe and Applebee's."

Known best for its chicken wings -- which bring 20% of revenue -- served by women wearing tight shorts and t-shirts with the owl-faced Hooters logo across the chest, Hooters has long used the taglines "Delightfully tacky, yet unrefined" and "Hooters: the cure for the common restaurant." The chain spends less than \$10 million in measured media to advertise its brand.

\$890 million in sales

With 413 restaurants and about 50 new units opening per year, Hooters' restaurants will break about \$890 million in sales this year. While Hooters' customer base is 68% male and 32% female, it "skews higher income than most people would think it does," said Mr. McNeil, noting the average household income is \$75,000. Because of that, the chain has been able to diversify with a surprisingly successful regional airline called Hooters Air. The company plans to open a hotel and casino in Las Vegas over Super Bowl weekend and recently began newsstand sales of its bi-monthly *Hooters* magazine.

"Our circulation is just under 300,000," said Mr. McNeil. The growing title won't be audited until its third issue, due out Oct. 25. He predicts that a soon-to-be launched Hooters MasterCard line extension will help drive subscriptions, now less than 10,000. "When people get that credit card, part of the benefit is to get a subscription to the magazine and that will help get that circulation up pretty quickly," he said.