



# GO GREEN

EXKi – an international chain of healthy, fast-casual, ‘grab-and-go’ restaurants – is all about sustainability. Pushing this green ethos is Robin Blondel, who leads more than 80 people across Europe.

**ROBIN BLONDEL**  
GM of New Markets, Global Head of Product and Supply Chain @ EXKi

With more than 20 years in the food game behind him, Robin Blondel is helping people to eat responsibly in nearly a century of EXKi (born from the word “exquisite”) joints spread across six countries in Europe.

“We’re organic as much as possible, use recycled plastic and local raw materials, and our electricity comes from green supplies,” explains the general manager of new markets and global head of product and supply chain. “My job includes explaining our business to consumers so we can show what sets us apart from the rest. We want everyone to eat in harmony with nature, it’s the best way to stay healthy. EXKi chooses partners and farmers who respect the planet. This is very important to us.”

“Eating in harmony with nature is the best way to stay healthy”

Since the first restaurant was set up by three friends (Nicolas, Arnaud, and Frédéric) in Brussels back in 2001, sustainable growth has remained at the heart of every decision the company makes. So much so, that Robin



says reducing its carbon footprint has become second nature. He’s lucky enough to draw on past experience working for the likes of high-end caterers Lenôtre and restaurant chain Ducasse Paris, established by multi Michelin star-winning chef Alain Ducasse. By learning from some of the best in the food and hospitality business, Robin can pass on his knowledge to the 80 or so people working under him in Italy, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, and the Netherlands.

**From seed to success**

Since joining the company in 2012, Robin has focused on getting the right structure in place, which he describes like planting a tree: “When you grow, if the seeds have been sowed in the right way, in the right type of soil, and in a suitable environment, the only thing you need to do is make sure the plant is pointing in the right direction. I’ve made sure the marketing and production teams work together, that all EXKi employees are pulling in the same direction so that we deliver what we set out to. I developed

new brand guidelines because when I started EXKi needed to be bolder in the market, people needed to know what we stood for.” If you drop into any one of the restaurants you’ll find a big selection of healthy options on the menu, from the Mauna Kea energy

“Spadel brands have always focused on delivering sustainable and healthy nourishment. We favour local distribution with low ecological impact – partnering with EXKi was therefore logical. Our next challenge is sustainable packaging. Join Source of Change and get in touch!”  
 Marc du Bois, CEO of Spadel

salad (organic jasmine and red rice, hummus with carrot and miso, broccoli, and sesame seeds) to the Casablanca, a hot dish of organic falafel, rice, and Oriental aubergine compote. There are loads of sandwiches, deli options, and buffets to choose from in every restaurant, all freshly prepared by the staff.

**Partners, not suppliers**

Everyone at EXKi is keen to make it known that the company does not call the people it works with “suppliers” – instead



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they're "partners." Most of them have been involved from the beginning and some strong bonds have been forged over the last 20 years, but the ride hasn't always been smooth. "Some partners couldn't cope with our development so there have been some bumps in the road," Robin explains. What's more, EXKi's customers are forever pushing the company to improve by giving valued feedback about packaging, reducing waste, and improving sustainability, creativity, and efficiency. This in turn spurs EXKi to encourage its partners to reach new heights so everyone involved can grow together.

*"Most of EXKi's partners have been involved from day one"*

The company strives to source the most local and organic fruit, veg, and other ingredients, while additives are avoided. Each restaurant also uses ingredients from a radius no larger than 300 km. One fun example of the company's commitment to a predominantly plant-based menu (half of the dishes are purely vegetarian) is the Veggie of the Month section on its website, which features a lucky vegetable alongside a recipe. Take the red cabbage salad with chives and sesame seeds, for example, or the pasta salad with Greek-style mushrooms. Food diversity and freshness are essential for a balanced diet and EXKi champions the use of non-processed foods with an emphasis on seasonal produce.

There's also some useful advice to be found on exki.com, like: "Eating more vegetables reduces your intake of acids, calories, carbohydrates and gluten. In addition, it increases your intake of fibre, minerals, vitamins, and trace elements. Your well-being is our primary concern."

**People business**

EXKi says eating should be about pleasure. "We are transparent and committed to offering our clients great experiences," Robins says. "McDonald's, for example, is fast and conven-

ient but it's obvious that it's not that good for you – at EXKi we make sure everything we serve is nutritious and of the highest quality. We also hire the right people, develop them, and make sure they're happy in their work. By treating our staff well, we get happy staff in return who take pride in brilliant customer service – we give our staff a sense of purpose and are completely open with them."

Robin adds that he doesn't view the industry as a food business, but instead a people business. He puts success – and failure – down to people, which is why EXKi invests so much time, money, and love into its staff. "We have two core values at EXKi – the first is honesty. Honesty to our customers, partners, and staff. The second is to serve customers as you expect to be served yourself," he says.

So the next time you happen to be peckish in Europe and it's a toss-up between a McDonald's or Burger King, look out for the green sign of EXKi (with a carrot standing in for the "i") – the food on offer is guaranteed to nourish your mind, body, and soul. [👉](#)

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Isabelle Stroobants, junior brand manager, Tao Family



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