

Dip in for Yumi foods

By CASEY NEILL

YUMI'S is not just a dip brand - it's a man.

Benjamin Friedman founded the business in a Ripponlea fresh fish shop more than 20 years ago.

The Hebrew pronunciation of Benjamin is with a Y in place of the J.

"The Hungarians call Benjamins Yumi for short," his brother and Yumi's CEO Michael Friedman said.

"He was in the front of the shop selling kosher fish. There was wholesale at the back.

"When the guy at the back of the shop moved out I bought in and became partner."

That was in 1992. Benjamin and Michael's grandfather bought a Canadian fish business that specialised in mayonnaise-based dips.

"We went overseas and we learnt how to make the mayonnaise and mix it with fish and make a dip out of that," Mr Friedman said.

"We built a small smokehouse and started making fish dips.

"We sold that in our shop and we sold that in kosher shops in our area and then kosher shops in Sydney, and that's how it started."

Today Yumi's employs more than 100 people in Hallam and there are plans to double its size in the next four to five years.

The company moved into supermarkets and introduced vegetable dips - still manufacturing in the back of the fish shop.

"We couldn't fit in the shop anymore so we hired a warehouse around the corner just to be able to store things," Mr Friedman said.

Yumi's built a factory in Cheltenham in 1999 but the company grew so fast that within a year it rented a factory across the road to store raw ingredients.

"Then about 2006, 2007 we bought another building across the road from the main factory and we moved the offices and despatched to that site and we turned the whole factory into manufacturing," he said.



Shaun and Marcus check for quality. 140986

Pictures: GARY SISSONS

we couldn't keep working from three places on one street."

The company bought its Wedgewood Road site in 2011. Yumi drove its transformation from an empty shell to custom-built plant in five months.

"That would take a normal builder 18 months," Mr Friedman said.

"He's a pusher, he likes to get things done. That's his motto. That's how we've grown.

"We're very close to outgrowing the site."

He never thought the business would reach the heights it has.

"We've always pushed to take it to the next level," Mr Friedman said.

"But did we have this vision? No, probably not this big.

"Today we sit around a board room talking about strategy but back then it wasn't like that, we just got on and did it."

"We just pushed very hard, got the contracts and did it." He said the key was "making real dips like you make them at home" instead of flavoured cream cheese.

"We saw a niche in the market," he said.

Other salmon dips were made with 80 per cent cream cheese. They used 50 per cent fish.

"Nobody else does that," he said.

"There's no fillers. There's no breadcrumbs.

"I get phone calls from flavouring companies saying 'I could sell you this flavour or that flavour'.

"We don't use flavours, we use kitchen ingredients.

"All the ingredients you've got at home in your pantry we use here, we just buy them in bulk."

All products are gluten free, dairy free and kosher.

"We don't use any dairy. In kosher you use

separate kitchens for dairy and separate kitchens for meat. You can't mix those two," he said.

"If we had dairy you couldn't use any of my products in a meat kitchen.

"And kosher dairy is quite involved. High level you have a supervisor at the farms.

"We would love to because one of the biggest dips is tzatziki and French onion and spring onion.

"At the moment we don't even play in that market. If we were going to do that we would have to open another factory across the road.

"We've thought about it a lot but we haven't done it."

The next growth area for Yumi's is not in dips.

"We're doing the vegetarian bites and were looking to expand in other areas in chilled foods," Mr Friedman said.

"It's growing and we've got a lot of new product development."

The business was growing so fast in 2013 that the Friedmans decided it was too big to remain a family business.

"We sold off a lot of it to a private equity fund. We're now owned partly by the Friedman family still - which is me and my brother - and partly by this equity fund, like a partnership," he said.

"But they're not involved. They're in Sydney and we see them once a month for a board meeting."

The fund injected money and set up structures that were previously absent from the business, like an operations manager and a chief financial officer.

"We work well together," he said.

But the Friedmans still own and run Ripponlea Fish Shop.

"My mum sits at the cash register and I've got four or five staff," Mr Friedman said.

"I drop in every morning.

"The shop sells mainly fresh fish. They do a lot of fried fish and they sell all the products that are made here."

Journal
6 July
2015

BUSINESS — YUMI'S
FRESH FISH — WEDGEWOOD ROAD