



MARIA RIVERA

Chief Executive Officer | President

Omnichannel Retail | D2C | Hospitality & Foodservice | Manufacturing
Atlanta, GA

CEO and brand builder widely recognized for scaling high-growth ventures, transforming legacy businesses, and unlocking innovation that drives enterprise value across restaurants, hospitality, and consumer goods. Brings deep cross-sector credibility and thrives at the intersection of disruption, brand strategy, and operational scale.

A business lifecycle expert with experience leading both turnaround and breakout environments, bringing a modern playbook for today's disrupted consumer landscape. Experienced in working closely with venture capital, private equity, and founder teams to accelerate growth, drive transaction readiness, and build brands that spark revenue and fandom.

Known for architecting franchise systems, reimagining omnichannel strategies, and scaling modern brand experiences. Launched hundreds of physical locations and led unprecedented growth with disciplined execution and positioning. A cultural architect committed to building resilient, high-performing teams, with earned recognition across industries for ability to scale both businesses and the people who power them.

Builds teams from the ground up to support a myriad of services and businesses within a diverse infrastructure of a company. Rolls up sleeves to lead and connect with employees and understand day-to-day operations to ensure authenticity and practical strategies. Earns trust from boards, investors, and stakeholders with swift decisions, innovative ideas, and big results.

EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

BRAND BUILDING + MARKET MOMENTUM

Smalls Sliders: Scaled company from early state concept to 400+ units open or under development across 30 states in less than two years.

Krispy Kreme: Grew US and Canada from \$300M to \$1B revenue and EBITDA by +15% YOY. Double digit top/bottom growth YOY.

TRANSACTION READINESS + STRATEGIC EXPANSION

TGI Fridays: Led Northeast portfolio M&A integration operations through Carlson separation and acquisition by Sentinel Capital Partners.

Krispy Kreme: Orchestrated efforts for 22 acquisitions from deal structure through integration.

TRANSFORMATION & TURNAROUNDS

Logan's Roadhouse: Implemented and executed bankruptcy strategy for 250 units, preventing business closure.

TGI Fridays: Refranchised 74 distressed units, moving them to profitable in a saturated market.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Walt Disney World: Led largest 9/11 emergency task force (resort division), while repurposing lodging and food supplies to ensure the safety of 40k+ guests.

Krispy Kreme: Led COVID response to keep essential manufacturing operations running. Developed and rolled out safety operating playbook for all businesses, maintained entire workforce without furloughs, and won Best-in-Class Food Safety Awards.

FRANCHISING

Smalls Sliders: Developed full go to market franchise business and operating model, onboarded 49+ developers in 18 months and delivered a real estate pipeline of 42+ leases executed for 2025.

EXPERIENCE

SMALLS HOLDINGS, LLC (Atlanta, GA)
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER & BOARD MEMBER (2022 - 2025)

- Scaled Smalls Sliders from early-stage concept to 400+ units open or under development across 30 states in less than two years- ushering in a new era of capital-efficient QSR growth.
- Built the team from the ground up, including values framework and people systems to support a culture of performance and connectedness.
- Initiated development of company-owned restaurants to complement franchise growth and invest in long-term brand success.
- Catalyzed brand awareness to 20+ billion PR impressions annually and 26% national brand awareness in less than 2 years .
- Launching 1PD/3PD, loyalty rewards, and a fully reimagined brand positioning and a signature Pantone color all in 2024
- Industry recognition:
 - 2022: QSR magazine: 40/40 List: America's Hottest Startup Fast Casuals
 - 2023: Nation's Restaurant News: Breakout Brands
 - 2023 & 2024: QSR Magazine: 50 Contenders
 - 2023 & 2024: Entrepreneur Magazine: Top New & Emerging Franchises
 - 2024: Inc. Magazine: 5000 Fastest-Growing Companies in America
 - 2024: Technomic: Future 50 Growth Chains in America.

KRISPY KREME DOUGHNUT CORPORATION
(Winston-Salem, NC & Charlotte, NC)
PRESIDENT, US (2022)
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, US & CANADA (2019 - 2022)

- Responsible for \$1B P&L and 12+k employees. Developed end-to-end strategy to optimize the totality of US and Canada operations, including return on capital investment, brand positioning implications, sales performance, and EBITDA margins.
- Developed and executed omnichannel strategy, with the addition of e-commerce, delivered fresh daily, and drive-thrus + OLO.

- Stood up 7 new CPG SKUs for 4,500 Walmart locations.

VICE PRESIDENT, US & CANADA RETAIL (2018 - 2019)
VICE PRESIDENT, US COMPANY OPERATIONS (2016 - 2018)

- Led day-to-day operations for US and Canada, 25 franchise groups, and three joint venture partner businesses in Canada and California.
- Developed structure to execute 22 acquisitions, leading deal structure, transactions, and integrations for each.
- Orchestrated plans for a series of buybacks to move company ownership from 10% to 90%.

LOGAN'S ROADHOUSE HOLDINGS, LLC
(Nashville, TN)
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS (2015 - 2016)

- Developed bankruptcy strategy for 26 franchises (230 locations with \$626M revenue) and executive-level restructuring.
- Turned a profit for the first time in +16 quarters. Improved profit margins with enterprise cost savings initiatives of +\$20M in EBITDA and procurement savings of \$11M in EBITDA.
- Invested in food quality, labor deployment, and employee support, delivering record improvements in guest satisfaction.

PREVIOUS EXECUTIVE ROLES INCLUDE:
TGI FRIDAYS, INC:
VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS

DARDEN RESTAURANTS, INC:
REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS
HARRAH'S ENTERTAINMENT, INC
VICE PRESIDENT, FOOD & BEVERAGE

PLUS VARIOUS ROLES AT:
LXR LUXURY RESORTS/HILTON WORLDWIDE
AND THE **WALT DISNEY COMPANY/THE WALT DISNEY WORLD RESORT**

AFFILIATIONS

MEMBER:

- Multicultural Foodservice and Hospitality Alliance
- Women's Food Service Forum
- CHIEF Private Network
- Signature Surge, Founding Member
- ALPFA (Association of Latino Professionals for America)
- Latino Corporate Directors Association

BOARD MEMBER:

- The Woodruff Arts Center

FORMER BOARD MEMBER EXPERIENCE:

- W.K.S. Krispy Kreme
- KKI Relief Fund (501c, non-profit)

EDUCATION

COLORADO TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY, MS
Organizational Leadership and Change

ROLLINS COLLEGE, MA
Liberal Arts and Sciences

UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO, BS
Organic Chemistry
Minor in Mathematics

CONTACT

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