GUIDE

Profitable Restaurants Turn More Tables

For fast casual operators, simplifying the process of delivering food can lead to happier customers and increased profits.

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INTRODUCTION

The Chicago-based research firm NPD Group forecasts that restaurant traffic will be flat in 2013, with spending expected to increase just 2 percent for the year. For the first quarter of the year, breakfast was the only foodservice daypart that increased visits (up 2 percent) in the quarter. Lunch visits were flat, supper was down 1 percent and visits during the afternoon snack daypart declined by 2 percent.

"Ongoing consumer economic concerns coupled with the payroll tax hike will continue to hinder restaurant industry growth," said Bonnie Riggs, restaurant industry analyst with NPD.

Even so, the outlook for restaurant operators is far from hopeless.

"It's important for operators and foodservice manufacturers to keep in mind that consumers still made over 61 billion restaurant visits last year, which means that there is still significant demand," Riggs said. "Understanding and meeting the wants and needs of restaurant consumers is the best way to build traffic."

Along with high-quality food, consumers are becoming increasingly responsive to an improved dining experience. It's critical, then, that restaurant operators take advantage of all available tools to better serve their customers and preemptively solve any problems before they occur. Imagine knowing from anywhere in a restaurant when a customer's order is running a few minutes behind and being able to reassure that customer before he becomes upset, or being able to deliver food to a customer's table within seconds of the order being completed. Or imagine how many additional customers could be served during a busy lunch period by shaving even 30 seconds off the average ticket time.

Technological developments have made possible data-tracking and customer-service tools that weren't available even just a few years ago. In the following pages, we'll take a look at some of those tools and how they can be used to better serve the customer.

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FastCasual.com would like to thank Addison, Texas-based Long Range Systems for its sponsorship of this guide, which allows us to offer it at no cost.

CHAPTER 1

Improving the customer experience

If there's a bright spot on the restaurant horizon, it's in the fast casual segment. The market position just above quick-service restaurants and below casual dining, where guests order at the counter but the menu and surroundings are a step up from fast food, seems to hold tremendous appeal for maturing but still cost-conscious consumers.

Eight of the 10 fastest-growing restaurant chains with sales above $2 million are from the fast casual sector, according to food industry research firm Technomic. In total, the top 10 fastest-growing chains' sales accounted for $10.3 billion in 2012, a 22 percent increase over 2011. Unit counts grew 15 percent.

However, that doesn't mean that every operator is sharing equally in the pie.

"It is certainly encouraging to see overall industry growth rates return to levels not seen since 2007," said Ron Paul, president of Technomic. "On a chain-by-chain basis, however, performance still varies substantially, as organizations continue adapting their value proposition to meet consumer demands and refining operations to meet various industry challenges."

"It is certainly encouraging to see overall industry growth rates return to levels not seen since 2007"

—Ron Paul, president of Technomic

Redefining the model

In general, the menu of a fast casual restaurant is more complex than that of a fast-food establishment. Most dishes are prepared to order rather than prepared in advance, meaning orders at a fast casual restaurant tend to take a bit longer to prepare than those at their quick-service cousins.

Because those orders aren't handed to the customer instantly, when fast casuals first came on the scene operators searched for ways to manage the process of getting orders to the customers as quickly as possible. At first, many took a page from the fast-food playbook and issued customers a numbered receipt. When the order was complete, a counter worker would call out the number and hand the order to the guest.

Schlotzsky's Deli, for example, originally used such a system. Once a guest's order was ready, the number was called out over an intercom system heard throughout the restaurant.

In 2009, though, the company dropped that system in favor of one where guests were given a number that is displayed on the table. The food is then brought to the table by a Schlotzsky's employee. The move was part of a process of enhancing the brand across all aspects of restaurant operations — from updating store design to enhancing catering and customer services.

Management felt like the operation already offered a good value proposition, so the company was looking for ways to improve the environment.

"For me, the biggest issue was just the noise," said Schlotzsky's Deli President Kelly Roddy. "It has improved noise clutter."

Eliminating the receipt system solved a number of other issues. With the number call-out system, customers would often pick up the wrong order, or if the sandwich was not made to a customer's specifications, the guest would have to wait in line again to fix the problem. With the table-number system, if an order is incorrect, the staff person delivering the food can address the problem immediately.

Room for improvement

While placing numbers on tables to assist food runners certainly has an advantage over having counter staff repeatedly shout out numbers, the system has its own set of weaknesses. If the guest forgets to place the number in the holder, it becomes quite difficult to match the order to the correct table.

In addition, the system has at least two unintended consequences. One, during a busy period the food runner might be forced to do the "food waltz," making a trip around the entire dining room in search of the correct table. That is especially time consuming at restaurants with a patio offering customers outdoor seating. In the meantime, the guest's order gets cold. Two, it tends to force the guest to watch the runners to see if their food is on the way, depriving them of a relaxing experience.

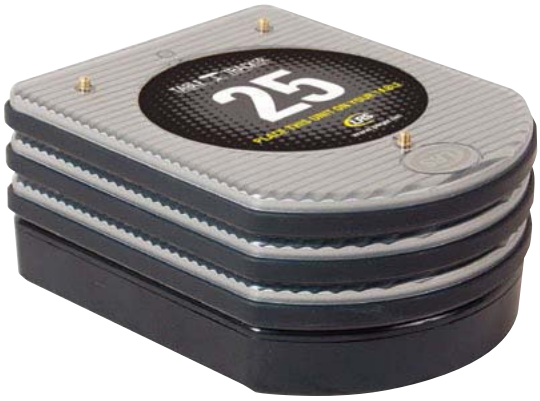
Some attempts to improve on that system have involved the use of handheld pagers given to guests when they place orders. When the order is complete, the pager alerts the guest to return to the counter for pickup.

Still, pagers put the responsibility of getting the food to the table on the guest. For operators looking to create a superior customer service experience, that

may not be what they want. Having tableside delivery offers those operators a competitive edge by creating more of a casual dining experience.

Some fast casual operators are using radio-frequency identification technology as a means of locating tables and speeding up the delivery of food to guests. RFID uses radio-frequency magnetic fields to identify and track tags attached to objects. The tags contain electronically stored information that can be read by another device such as a handheld scanner, similar to the way a grocery-store scanner reads the barcode on a carton of milk. The key difference between barcodes and RFID tags is that the RFID scanning device doesn't have to "see" the tag.

Long Range Systems launched Table Tracker, an RFID-based table-location system designed for restaurants that employ food runners to deliver orders to guests. When a guest places an order, the cashier gives him a Table Tracker, a device about the size of a CD case, and a timer is started for that order.

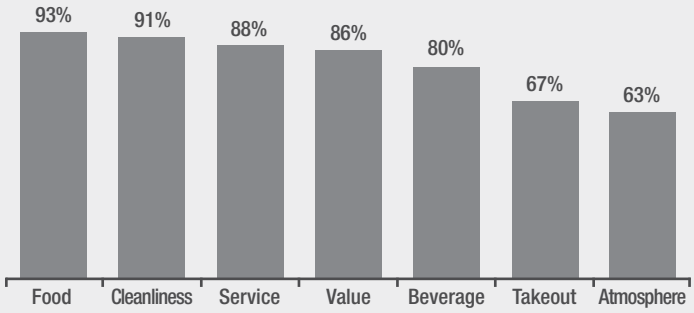


Tables in the dining room have RFID tags mounted underneath that contain information identifying the location of the table. Guests place the Table Tracker on the table after placing an order. The device reads the table number and sends that information to a touchscreen display in the expeditor area. When the order is ready, the runner checks the screen and knows exactly where the food should be delivered, ensuring guests receive their food as soon as possible. If the food isn't delivered by a preprogrammed time, then a manager can be notified automatically.

Service is one of the top 3 factors in consumer importance

Consumers Rate Food Attributes as the Most Important

Top two box = % saying attribute is important or very important



Source: National Restaurant Association

“The gap between fast casual and casual is closing because casual chains want a piece of the growing fast-casual market,” said Skip Cass, CEO of Long Range Systems. “With this trend developing, it’s clear that a restaurant’s ability to deliver food hot and fresh as fast as possible is key to repeat business, and customers won’t expect to sacrifice quality.”

And if for some reason the guest isn’t at a table, the device can be used as a traditional pager, alerting the guest when the order is ready. That capability allows the device to serve double duty, serving not only dine-in customers but those placing a carryout order as well.

“There’s the primary-use case of being able to identify the customer at the table and being able to deliver the food to them in a quicker, more effective way,” said Charlie Lang product manager for Table Tracker. “But in the instances where they are not sitting at a table or they put the tracker in their purse or something like that, the staff still has the ability to page them.”

Case study: Jason's Deli

Jason's Deli was founded in 1976 by Joe Tortorice Jr. From the beginning, Tortorice was committed to delivering fresh food and premium, more natural ingredients. Jason's Deli was the first major restaurant concept in the United States to ban artificial trans fats and the first to eliminate high-fructose corn syrup.

Customers can choose from a gluten-free menu, vegetarian sandwiches or healthy kids' meals, or they can invent a sandwich via the "build your own" selections. With a well-stocked salad bar featuring organic choices and the world's best Reuben, Jason's Deli is sure to have something on the menu that will please anyone.

The restaurant handled food delivery with a system that worked for the last 20 years—the workers handed the customer a plastic ticket that's placed in a holder on the table. The food runners would have to search for the table when the order was ready.

But when new technology was developed that could affect the guest experience, Jason's Deli was eager to try it.

"We're somewhat old school, but to have a system that helps us measure ticket times, deliver food faster and improve the customer experience was something we had to implement," said Michael Johnson, a regional manager.

THE SOLUTION

Table Tracker is an RFID system developed by Addison, Texas-based Long Range Systems that speeds up food delivery. When a guest places the Table Tracker device on the table, it sends that table's exact number to the kitchen display via RFID tags installed under the table. The RFID tags aren't visible to guests and don't take up space.

After observing Table Tracker in action at a competitor's store, Jason's Deli purchased systems for some of its stores.

"We saw immediate improvement in ticket times," Johnson said. "We shaved a full minute off ticket times just by having the ability to prioritize orders and deliver food faster. Runners find customers more quickly and get back to the next delivery faster just because we use Table Tracker."

Jason's has a standalone system containing three components: a touchscreen display monitor, Table Tracker devices and a map of the restaurant to help food runners remember table numbers. The company found the installation and the implementation process to be pain-free.

"Anytime there's a big change like implementing new technology, you can expect a little anxiety in the beginning," Johnson said. "But we really have a partnership with LRS, so any issues that came up during installation or later were resolved quickly." ■

CHAPTER 2

Improving operations

Speed is definitely king in a fast casual restaurant. At lunchtime, diners will frequently select a restaurant by how fast the food is delivered and how far they have to drive instead of basing that choice on the restaurant's menu.

Despite the importance of speed, however, the time it takes food to be delivered to a table has traditionally been one of the most difficult aspects for a fast casual operation to measure. And if operators can't measure food-delivery times, they won't know if those times need improvement.

Some of the common ways operators have attempted to measure food-delivery times include:

- Proprietary research through mystery shoppers
- Manually tracking delivery times vs. ticket times
- Surveying customers on perceptions of speed
- Technology-based solutions that automate tracking

Although all methods offer some benefit, there are down sides, as well. Research studies are often expensive, and the observational nature of mystery shopping can lead to incomplete results. Manual clocking of delivery times can be tedious and takes managers' time away from more pressing tasks. Relying on consumer perception alone usually doesn't tell the full story.

The biggest weakness of those methods is that by the time an operator sees the results, problem situations are hours, days or even weeks in the past. Without this data, management lacks the ability to address problems — including lost orders or slow delivery times — as they surface, which could lead to bad reviews, lost customers and a decrease in revenue.

Measuring efficiency

Table-location technology provides an easy way for fast casual restaurants to track and measure food-delivery performance. Data provided by the system gives food runners the ability to reference a prominently displayed screen, locate the order and the corresponding table, and deliver food quickly.

At Jason's Deli, for example, food runners struggled to identify correct tables, particularly during high-traffic periods of time, and food-delivery times were difficult to track. An internal study found that food runners were delivering food significantly slower than management believed.

After just a few weeks of installing Table Tracker at a test location, Jason's Deli reduced food-delivery times by a full minute compared with what it had been achieving using the table-number system. That number continues to improve, with some Jason's Deli locations continuing to trim food-delivery times by 40 percent or more over the initial benefit in the months following installation.

By tracking the consumer's table location, the staff knows precisely where to deliver food without having to engage in the "food waltz." Rather than roaming the dining room in search of a tabletop number, runners can engage guests, providing a higher level of customer satisfaction and addressing concerns before they become a problem.

If an order is delayed, it becomes highlighted in yellow, then orange and eventually red, as more time passes. IIf the food isn't delivered by a preprogrammed time, then a manager can be notified automatically, giving him the opportunity to deal with the situation before it becomes a major problem. By having that information at their fingertips, operators can more easily spot problems and make changes as needed.

"It's an automated system that helps you measure operational functions," said Michelle Strong, Long Range Systems VP of marketing. "How fast are you ordering and delivering food to the table, and how fast are you turning those tables?"

Having instant access to order-delivery information allows restaurant operators to either use less labor or deploy that labor more efficiently. By tracking the production of an order, food preparation staff knows what orders are delayed and have exceeded time standards, enabling managers to deploy people as needed to better manage the preparation process.

And by reducing the noise, chaos and order-pickup congestion associated

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with paging systems, operators can provide a better overall dining experience for their guests.

"It ultimately allows you to affect employee performance because you are measuring that performance," Strong said. "For the guest, you are able to provide an extra level of service by bringing them their food rather than asking them to pick it up themselves."

Lunchtime spending

Annual spending per person on dining out for lunch:	$2,000
Weekly spending by those 45 or younger:	$45.78
Weekly spending by those older than 45:	$31.80

Source: Accounting Principals

Case study: Mia's

Johnny Carrabba, founder of Carrabba's Italian Grill, opened his fast casual concept Mia's in 2012. Mia's, named after his daughter, has a casual feel and a warm, playful ambiance. Located right behind the original Carrabba's in Houston, it resembles an old home in the Texas Hill Country. The menu for this country casual, counter-service restaurant is filled with made-to-order burgers, tacos and salads, smoked ribs, chicken and pork.

Carrabba built his success in the restaurant business by focusing on two things: great food and great service. He founded Carrabba's on those principles and wanted to follow suit with Mia's, but food runners at Mia's were spending much of their time walking around, looking for guests and screaming their names, which disrupted the comfortable atmosphere and delayed food delivery. That changed after he installed RFID-based table-location technology.

"Almost immediately, we saw faster ticket times just because everyone had visibility of order status," Carrabba said. "Food wasn't getting cold while the runner searched for a table. Runners didn't have to call out to customers, so the environment improved overnight."

Mia's has a standalone system containing three components: a touchscreen monitor, Table Tracker devices and a map of the restaurant to help food runners remember table numbers. The system collects data on turn times and delayed orders. Any manager or staff at the corporate office can view that information online, which can help develop strategies to reduce delayed orders and improve turn times.

At Mia's, the food was delivered faster, the atmosphere was noticeably quieter and staff could manage their time better, Carrabba said. Food runners don't waste time circling the restaurant, looking for customers or fielding customer complaints about delayed or cold food.

"It definitely impacted staff retention in a good way," he said. "I know that providing better working conditions will help me keep staff." ■

CHAPTER 3

Increasing revenue

Oft-quoted studies conducted by the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs indicate that one dissatisfied customer is likely to tell nine other people about the experiences that resulted in the dissatisfaction, while satisfied customers will tell five other people. Unexpected experiences, both positive and negative, are the key drivers of word-of-mouth.

According to Cambridge, Mass.-based Forrester Research, just a small shift in customer loyalty can lead to increased revenue. In addition, Forrester data confirm a strong relationship between the quality of a customer's experience and loyalty measures, such as willingness to consider the company for another purchase, likelihood to switch to another company and likelihood to recommend.

Empathica Inc., a provider of customer experience management solutions to restaurants and other industries, predicts that 2013 will be a pivotal year for improving customer relationships. The company has identified a number of CEM trends emerging so far in 2013. Among those trends is a new focus on experience as consumers demand service quality as much as product quality. Brands have to rediscover that selling products often requires attentive staff in a great atmosphere that inherently makes the customer feel more attractive, healthy or happy, the firm said. The challenge for all enterprises this year is to figure out how to improve the customer experience on a local level.

A number of restaurant operators in the casual-dining segment are looking at adopting a fast casual model, particularly during lunch, as a way to create an enhanced experience for their customers and to increase sales.

Kansas City, Mo.-based Applebee's, for example, is taking a page out of the fast casual playbook in an effort to boost its fortunes. Same-store restaurant sales for the company fell 1.3 percent in the first quarter of 2013, according to parent DineEquity, and the number of restaurants in operation

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fell by 11 to 2,018 versus the previous year. DineEquity has been selling restaurants back to franchisees in recent years.

The company introduced an “express lunch” service at one location in mid-2012. The idea was such a success that the casual-dining chain is now offering the service in all of its 23 corporate-owned restaurants in the Kansas City area.

During lunch on weekdays, a section of the restaurant turns into a fast casual operation, where guests can order and pay upfront at the Applebee’s Express Lunch counter. They seat themselves and servers bring the drinks and food to the table. Customers can leave as soon as they’re done.

“People are driven by value, they are certainly driven by quality and I think they are driven by time,” Bob Rentfro, Applebee’s director of operations, told the Kansas City Star. “I think consumers in general are more driven by time especially at lunch, and you see that in the marketplace and the types of restaurants now in the market."

If customers embrace the fast casual lunches, the chain may roll it out to franchisees.

Moving to a fast casual operation during the lunch hour enables casual restaurants to increase incremental traffic and reach an entirely new customer base. According to foodservice research firm Sandelman & Associates, about a quarter of casual-dining consumers say they are eating out less often, with 40 percent of those consumers choosing to dine instead at fast

casual or quick-service restaurants. Casual concepts getting a piece of this business during the most desired part of the day for fast casual service can show quick ROI for a stronger bottom line.

“Fast casual has set the bar really high,” said Chris Miller, executive vice president at Sandelman & Associates. “In order for a new concept to break in, [it] has to really deliver on that great food and experience.”

For those looking to adopt a fast casual business model to boost revenue, table-location technology can be an integral part of the process. Table-location technology allows a restaurant to achieve a number of benefits, with increased guest satisfaction at the top of the list. Management can strive to increase guest satisfaction through awareness of late orders and increased speed of service. Additional benefits include escalation notifications, detailed reporting, reduced labor costs and no equipment to clean up or maintain.

The technology provides information that is:

- Accurate: It employs RFID technology to accurately identify a customer’s exact location and send the data to a mounted screen for easy viewing.
- Instantly accessible: Easily accessed insights provide real-time data centrally displayed on-site for employees and managers to understand order status and overall performance.
- Consistent and complete: Each step in the ordering, seating, meal delivery and table clearing process is captured and maintained, providing a full view of the customer’s visit.

Ultimately, that information offers the operator the ability to increase revenue.

The most immediate impact on revenue is through quicker turnover and reduced wait times. By shaving even a minute off the time it takes for guests to receive their orders, those guests spend less time at the table even while enjoying their meals for the same amount of time. Quicker turnover means more guests can be served in the same amount of time, leading to increased revenue. Reduction or elimination of waiting lines means guests who otherwise might have gone to a less busy restaurant will stay instead.

By also serving as a standard guest pager, table-location technology can be a key part of a carryout program. Nearly 60 percent of consumers recently surveyed by Technomic said they purchase takeout once a week or more. Those takeout sales don’t seem to be cannibalizing dine-in traffic, but rather adding revenue for restaurants. Sixty percent of consumers who

recently purchased a takeout order said that if they had not done so on that occasion, they would have likely made food at home instead.

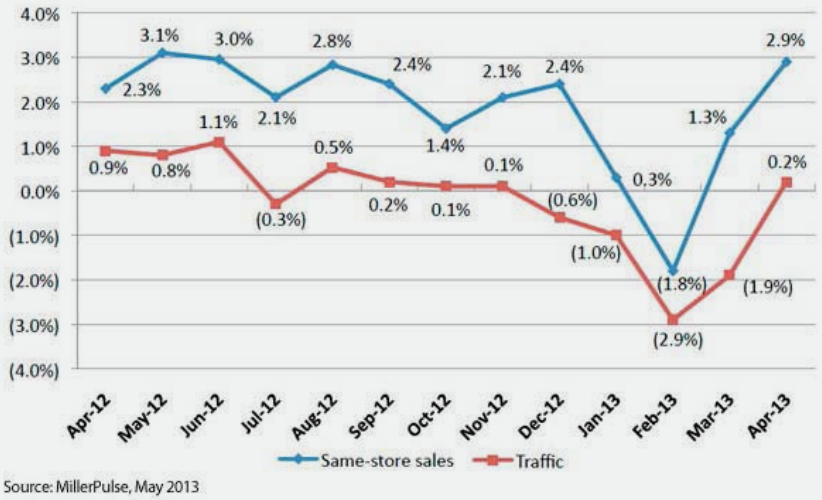
"In many cases, consumers do not view takeout orders as a part of the same consideration set as food purchased to be eaten in the dining room or onsite," said Joe Pawlak, Technomic vice president. "Operators have a real opportunity to gain an advantage if they can respond to consumers' needs for convenience, accuracy and food quality."

And although it might seem that the key beneficiary of table-location technology are those operations with large dining rooms and lunchtime waiting lines, even restaurants that are small enough for the entire dining room to be visible to the staff at the counter can still benefit from such a system.

"We've tested Table Tracker in scenarios where the dining room is small enough where the manager can see where everyone is," Strong said. "We still see a significant improvement in the food prep line because they can see exactly how long it's taking them to deliver the food. The mere fact that the team knows they are being measured on every order prompts them to improve over time."

Restaurant industry same-store sales, traffic

Year-over-year monthly results, all respondents



Source: MillerPulse, May 2013

Trends in fast casual dining

- More than four out of five casual-dining consumers say they visit fast casual (85 percent) and traditional casual-dining restaurants (82 percent) at least once a month, and 40 percent of casual-dining consumers visit upscale casual-dining restaurants just as often.
- Consumers' fast casual and traditional casual-dining visits appear to be cutting into fast-food and upscale casual-dining visits, as consumers trade up from quick service and trade down from upscale casual-dining restaurants to these locations.
- In an effort to compete with quick-service restaurants, leading fast casual brands have expanded breakfast offerings by 31 percent since 2011; however, there's still plenty of opportunity as just 31 percent of leading fast casual restaurants offer breakfast.
- A third of consumers say they are ordering from the healthy menu more often than they did a year ago at fast casual (36 percent) and traditional casual-dining restaurants (34 percent), but just 27 percent of consumers say the same for upscale casual-dining restaurants.
- While price is a major deterrent for some upscale casual-dining consumers, 41 percent of consumers indicate that meals at these locations are worth the price because of the overall dining experience.

Source: Technomic's Future of Casual Dining Consumer Trend Report

CHAPTER 4

By the numbers

Compared to the return they deliver in terms of instantly available data and improved service times, table-management systems don't involve significant effort to install. In most cases, table-location systems can be installed in one night while the restaurant is closed, eliminating any disruption to business.

Of course, when considering adding a new technology, the first question most restaurant operators ask is a simple one: Are any potential savings gained by adding a new technology worth the cost of that technology? In other words, is this worth the money?

Aside from increased revenue by being able to serve guests more quickly, benefits of table-location technology include improved food costs. First, it allows for minimizing instances of guests receiving the incorrect order. Second, it reduces occasions when it's necessary to remake food that got cold while the food runner searched the dining room for a guest who might not have heard his or her number being called or forgot to display the order number at the table.

In addition, operators can reduce labor costs through more efficient deployment of workers. Customers care about quality of service, from the staff taking orders to the person delivering their food. But in an uncertain economy, labor is one place where owners and managers can cut cost, often at the expense of customer service and efficiency. By deploying technologies that identify opportunities to improve — or, better yet, that directly improve operational efficiency by making processes easier and faster — operators can achieve a stronger bottom line.

"A restaurant chain will have the ability to pinpoint certain hours of the day or certain days of the week when perhaps they need to staff another food runner or when they have too many food runners," Lang said. "It's much easier to see those areas of opportunity."

Return on investment, or ROI, is the amount of time it takes to get back the value of dollars spent on a project or item. Although specific numbers

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can be determined for specific situations, we can look at a hypothetical situation that assumes an ROI based on speed of service alone. Other scenarios might contemplate customer experience as a factor leading to repeat business, improved efficiencies causing a decrease in food and labor costs, or table-side delivery being a differentiator that creates a competitive advantage; however, this case looks at speed of service as the single contributing benefit to allow us to get a feel for what an operator might gain from installing an order-management system.

Under the calculations described below, shaving a minute off the average ticket time during a busy weekday lunch at a 100-seat restaurant (i.e. approximately 25-50 tables), can translate to the ability to serve an additional ten customers between 11 a.m.and 2 p.m. If the restaurant has a waiting line at any point during the lunch period, it's likely more people than that each day decide to settle for a less busy establishment simply because they are pressed for time.

Assuming a $10 ticket average, being able to serve ten additional customers a day translated to an additional $2,000 in revenue each month, or $24,000 per year. Depending on a business' average profit margin alone, the ROI can be significant. That doesn't include the impact of lower cost percentages due to the additional revenue, improved food and labor costs or increased business due to higher guest satisfaction or the ability to serve additional customers at other times of the day.

A hypothetical "speed of service" ROI scenario

Revenue and income additions through increased speed of service	
No. of seats	100
Average table turn time prior to table-management system installation	30 minutes
No. of guests served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.	300
Time savings per guest through use of table-management system	1 minute
Average table turn time after table-management system installation	29 minutes
Total time saved per day	150 minutes
Additional service opportunities (150 minutes saved/29 minutes per guest)	**10**
Average ticket	$10
Additional revenue opportunity per day (10 x $10)	$100
Additional revenue opportunities per month (weekdays only) (40 x $50)	**$2,000**

Seeing the return

Prior to installing Table Tracker, Jason's Deli had no benchmark for the order-to-guest process. With Table Tracker, orders that are delayed are highlighted yellow, then after a preprogrammed time determined by the operator they turn red. The display screen being visible to everyone in the kitchen solved several issues at the restaurant.

"When an order is delayed, everybody knows it," said Michael Johnson, regional manager. "Table Tracker gave us the ability to address an order delay with the customer before they get frustrated. We even know exactly when the customer sits down at the table, so we can prioritize food delivery. And food runners are definitely more efficient, so delivery is even faster."

Table Tracker offers the ability to measure the guest experience from order to delivery, providing ticket-time tracking and data to allow Jason's to see how it is improving over time. The system collects turn-time data and number of times a manager is paged when an order turns red, and that information can be viewed online. Both the in-store managers and stakeholders in the corporate office can use that information to identify trends and make improvements.

Guests also find the system easy to use, Johnson said.

"We just hand the customers a Table Tracker device instead of a plastic ticket," Johnson said. "All they have to do is put it on their table."

Jason's Deli saw immediate improvements in operations, staff efficiency, food delivery and customer satisfaction.

"Table Tracker had fast ROI," Johnson said. "Reduced ticket times, streamlined guest experience and simple installation all positively impacted our bottom line. The system makes it easy to benchmark where we are and where we need to improve, so implementing the system was a smart decision for our concept."

The company is putting together an internal Table Tracker team to take full advantage of the power of the system, Johnson said.

"This team is defining the steps we want to measure and goals we want to hit companywide. Jason's Deli has hundreds of stores nationwide," Johnson said. "Many of them can benefit from using this system." ■

CONCLUSION

It's difficult to say exactly why fast casual restaurants are growing so quickly. It could be because of a maturing population, an increasing concern for the value of the dining experience or a combination of those and other factors.

There are many variables when it comes to brand awareness and customer loyalty, but one thing is guaranteed: fast casual diners want good food and great service and will leave a restaurant never to return after one negative experience because they have so many restaurant choices. And the old adage "a customer who has a bad experience tells 10 people" is still true, although now they can tell the whole world through social media. Not meeting customer expectations results in low customer satisfaction and decreased sales, but it can ultimately put your business at risk.

Clearly, any tool that can improve food or service is worth investigating. And if that tool pays for itself, all the better.

Implementing the right technology can raise customer service levels and promote personal interaction that encourages repeat business. In an environment where competition is increasing every day, those are factors an operator can't afford to ignore.

Clearly, any tool that can improve food or service is worth investigating.

About the sponsor:

Long Range Systems (LRS) *is a leading global provider of on-site paging, guest management, business intelligence and market research tools. The company's hardware and software solutions are used in a variety of settings, including the hospitality, medical, retail and automotive industries. Specifically for fast casual restaurateurs, LRS developed Table Tracker: the fast casual food delivery system that streamlines operations and improves customer satisfaction. Table Tracker helps food runners deliver food faster instead of wandering around the restaurant looking for guests. It's proven to turn tables faster, improve guest satisfaction and streamline operations through knowledge and insights provided with order-tracking data.*

FastCasual.com *is owned and operated by Louisville, Ky.-based Networld Media Group. The food services division is a leading vertical publisher in the restaurant industry. Together with PizzaMarketplace.com and QSRweb.com, Networld Media Group provides the foodservice industry with thought-provoking news and updates on the latest trends.*