

BJ's Restaurants connects with innovative kitchen, table management & reservations technology

With more than sixty restaurants that serve a large and diverse menu, which includes signature deep dish pizzas, steaks, salads, sandwiches and famous deserts, BJ's Restaurants, Inc. competes for guest loyalty with many other high quality restaurants. Among its many key differentiators, BJ's has one in particular that gives the casual dining restaurant chain an extra edge. The company operates micro-breweries which produce and distribute BJ's critically acclaimed, handcrafted beers throughout the chain.

It's a strategy that has clearly paid off, as BJ's now retains a coast-to-coast presence while consistently growing by 20 percent to 25 percent annually. BJ's had to address several business and technology issues if it hoped to continue delivering the sincere service and hospitality its guests have come to expect, while simultaneously growing profits and market share.

Growth goals

"We appeal to a broad market segment, and we focus on being a differentiated concept that offers higher quality," says Brian Pearson, vice president of information systems at BJ's. "And because we are truly a coast-to-coast operator, we must address inefficiencies in our business model to make sure nothing holds back growth."

Jerry Deitchle, BJ's president and CEO, believes that technology is an accelerant to business process, notes Pearson, and is a key driver in helping BJ's transition from a good restaurant company that is growing to a restaurant growth company.

"Rather than looking at technology as just a means of reporting or saving money, at BJ's we ask, 'How do we leverage technology to accelerate our business processes, maximize operational efficiencies and improve the guest's experience?' and on top of that, 'how do we do it hundreds of times?'" says Pearson.

Tools for success

Pearson conducted extensive research to select the right technology vendor — one that could not only scale its solutions to meet BJ's growth strategy, but also serve as a true partner. That search continually pointed to QSR Automations.

After looking at several different kitchen systems, Pearson's team quickly got to work implementing QSR's graphical kitchen management solution. "We've had it

system wide for about a year," says Pearson. "We really believe in this product, as it has helped us streamline our kitchen operations."

The traditional model of using paper tickets to manage the fast and furious kitchen activity that occurs during peak hours isn't an option for BJ's, explains Pearson. Printers jam, papers are hard to read, and before long, ticket items are lost.

"Then you have to consider the full time person with experience directing all of this chaos behind the lines to make sure that the food comes out in a timely fashion, and all together for each ticket," says Pearson. "It is unlikely that a person can maintain this sort of pace for three to four hours at a time and maintain the quality that BJ's provides. Even more challenging is finding this key person in all of the new markets we're entering."

With QSR's ConnectSmart Kitchen, BJ's guest experience has vastly improved, according to Pearson, because restaurants can handle a large number of orders, including larger parties that select multiple menu items that all take different times to prepare.

Operations and information

"QSR is also helping us organize another very challenging area — the host stand. Recent public numbers have indicated that we retain the number two position in guest traffic in the industry. The kitchen and the host stand are two of the most complex areas of the business, and we are obviously going to leverage the best technology we can find in these areas to help us continue our path of sustainable growth."

With BJ's recently completing its implementation of QSR's table management system (ConnectSmart Hostess) for seating and wait list management, and current project to add reservations capabilities (ConnectSmart Reservations), Pearson says the vendor is fast becoming a critical pipeline of information for the company, which means different stakeholders across BJ's can now leverage valuable data much more easily.

"QSR's ConnectSmart solutions tie together critical processes in the restaurant, enabling us to effectively manage the guest experience and enhance operations — all the while giving us a much greater ability to gather key guest and operational data that we can use to make informed business decisions," says Pearson.



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