



Brinker International is cooking with QSR's kitchen management solution at 650 Chili's nationwide

When you're perfecting a sauce, consistency is everything. When you're competing in the sizzling table service restaurant business, consistency of service and quality may mean the difference between a standout customer experience and a forgettable one.

At leading restaurant operator Brinker International Inc., which boasts more than 1,400 restaurants under such household names as Chili's Grill & Bar, On The Border and Romano's Macaroni Grill, and which claims \$3.4 billion in system-wide sales, the daily challenge is how to maintain a competitive advantage versus some of the best in the business.

"The bar is being raised in our industry, especially in our segment," said Leon De Wet, VP of business intelligence for Brinker. "It's fiercely competitive, with operators not able to differentiate based on menu offerings alone. In the end, success revolves around restaurateurs and

store managers who can deliver the best quality and guest experience."

Brinker wanted to provide its Chili's associates with the best tool available to improve consistency and timing in the kitchen. In March 2003, the company completed the rollout of a complete hardware and software kitchen management solution from QSR Automations Inc. into all 650 company-owned units of the Chili's chain, which spans 49 states. With Brinker's commitment to thoroughness and excellence in mind, the 11-month project followed a year of pilot testing in 12 restaurants and months of prior evaluation.

"We are constantly looking for ways to improve any and all of our processes," explained De Wet. "We see the QSR kitchen management solution as an additional way to ensure the level of consistency and quality across the chain that is associated with the Chili's name."

QSR Automations Inc., headquartered in Louisville, Ky.,

develops and markets kitchen management solutions for hospitality and foodservice, including quick and table service restaurants, theaters and theme parks.

"Our menus continually evolve and grow," De Wet said. "Timing the food is a big challenge, so that hot food is served hot and cold food is served cold. This is critical, and is the biggest advantage of the QSR system."

Added De Wet, "The strongest benefits of the QSR solution are consistency of food quality, preparation and accuracy, so that all items for a particular table complete at the same time."

The solution manages multiple kitchen stations — four primary prep stations where menu items are routed from the point-of-sale at the item level, plus a station on the quality assurance side of the line for the servers to interact with and consolidate orders. To-go orders are also broken out on a separate station view for dedicated packaging, but food preparation for

all orders is integrated into the normal kitchen flow.

Said De Wet, "The ability to time food preparation and completion was the most important feature to us, and the primary benefit. Over time we will evaluate food timing more and more precisely based on the data that we now have access to from the software. From an operations perspective, our food and service is better."

QSR's intelligent kitchen management software lets operators define any number of views within the restaurant to meet their specific business needs throughout different times of the day. The software is fully configurable, providing advanced routing of orders and items, and also helps manage kitchen activities by gathering important speed of service timing data and events information in real-time. The reliable solution hardware includes purpose-built Ethernet video controllers and durable 20-button keypads.

"Transition to the new system went smoothly," said De Wet, who reported that it has been very well received internally. "As is always the case when introducing new technology, the store teams were cautious about embracing a procedural change. Our managers and the entire store teams came to quickly understand the benefits, and the system has been very successful."

Chili's employed a "train the trainer" approach in introducing the QSR system, added De Wet. Brinker developed its own process, centered around training sessions in the stores. "Now that



the initial training is complete, managers are responsible for training new employees."

A primary goal of the deployment was to make the system as user-friendly as possible to cooks and staff. QSR

and order statuses.

Said De Wet, "QSR has done a wonderful job of continuing to innovate the solution. The software offers more and more options, which we hope to take advantage of after thorough

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worked closely with Chili's on designing new system features, as well as customizing the solution to operate optimally within Chili's casual dining environment. The Brinker configuration includes a specific ticket flow, layout of each kitchen station view, and color-coding of item

testing."

He added, "The bottom line is that QSR has been a wonderful partner in this effort. We evaluated numerous solution providers, and QSR is the best. Brinker is very happy with the relationship."