



By Nicole Marie Richardson, Contributing Editor

Kitchen Confidence

In-kitchen technologies put the focus back where it belongs

Restaurant operators are the jugglers of the hospitality industry, managing everything from the supply chain and food safety concerns to labor cost and table turns. And on top of all that, they still have to make a profit. So no wonder why kitchen management has been relegated to the back burner. But no more. Restaurants are increasingly putting the focus back where it belongs: in the kitchen. With increased scrutiny of nutritional content and menu options, menu-engineering applications are getting a second look, while a new generation of kitchen management systems are streamlining operations and improving quality control.

Applebee's began refocusing attention on the kitchen in 1998 when it looked into finding a new kitchen management system that could meet all its needs and be flexible when it came to customizing the functionality of the solution. Applebee's list of demands was no short order. The new system was expected to simplify operations, reduce the noise level in the kitchen, improve communications among restaurant staff, improve food quality by synchronizing cooking, improve speed of service by creating a sense of urgency and help reduce the number of cooking errors, thereby reducing food cost and making it easier to train cooks. Applebee's was able to meet all these needs by choosing the QSR





Darden recently implemented a new kitchen display system at its Smokey Bones BBQ concept.

Automations' (qsrautomations.com) ePic Kitchen Management System, says John Fallucca, executive director, operations development, Applebee's International, who was directly involved in the choosing of the KMS.

Grass roots effort

"It all began with a grass roots effort in late 1998," explains Fallucca. "We started testing in 2000 in Minnesota and developed a soup to nuts implementation program that focused on a cross functional approach that touched on all aspects of our business. We then used the great results we obtained from the test units to help sell the program to our company and franchise restaurants. A solid implementation plan helped us move quickly to the field."

Fallucca adds that there are many added benefits to choosing the ePic KMS, including color coordination of the items on the screen that bring attention to the newer, healthy menu items that were recently added. Another benefit is the possibility of upgrading or including additional functionality offered by QSR.

With the launch of QSR's ConnectSmart Hospitality Automation Solution, Applebee's may one day take

advantage of customized graphical views at each kitchen station, as well as dynamically display menu cards and enhanced order and item details.

Though Applebee's has plans to upgrade, right now Fallucca is excited about the company's technology investment. "We were expecting ROI, and it took less than a year to achieve it!" exclaims Fallucca.

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Fallucca suggests when choosing a KMS for a casual-dining restaurant that the ease of integration with the point-of-sale system be one very important consideration, in addition to cost effectiveness, because "the ROI threshold must be met," he reveals.

"It must also be simple, easy to use and have graphic capabilities," adds Falluca. "And none of that matters if you don't have a partner who is willing to listen to your needs and customize when necessary."

No Bones about it

For many of the same reasons, Darden restaurants has also selected QSR Automations ePic Kitchen Management Solution for its Smokey Bones Barbeque and Grill restaurants. Darden, which also owns and operates more than 1,300 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, and Bahama Breeze restaurants, is using QSR's ePic KDS, ePic video controllers, and KP-3000 keypads in all Smokey Bones Barbeque and Grill locations, Darden's fastest growing business unit. The company is using QSR's kitchen management system to help manage its food production and especially delivery.

Using the advanced delay routing functionality of the KDS, all items within an order are ready to be served at the same time. Each menu item is routed to kitchen preparation stations based on customized routing rules that take into account the cook times of all items within the order. Front-of-house personnel easily monitor the status of their orders at the assembler view, where every change made at each kitchen station is reflected with user-defined display attributes. The KDS also manages orders for combination platters by displaying the individual items for which that particular kitchen

station is responsible, while still displaying the complete combination at the assembler station view for servers.

A laboratory of change

Nora Nyland, dietetics program director for Brigham Young University, agrees that the ability to customize the needs of the restaurant is key when deciding what kitchen management system to use. Like all other cafeteria-style restaurants, the BYU Café not only had to crank out a variety of menu items for an enormous



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amount of people, but every item must be readily available at all hours.

“I’ve been at BYU 22 years, and I wrote the proposal for the Computrition educational grant,” tells Nyland. “Our foodservice operation is a laboratory for the Food Production Management course. It is open only for lunch, four days a week for nine weeks in the fall semester and nine weeks in the winter

semester, and serves about 150 to 200 patrons a day. I wanted to do two things with our Computrition system (computrition.com): streamline the actual operation, and more importantly, give students exposure to using the system in foodservice management. Computrition offers very generous support for education programs, and has been an important part of our lab for many years.”

As part of the implementation process Nyland attended a training session and then hired several students to begin data entry of items and recipes. “Frankly, it took a while to have the system up and running, partly because it wasn’t our first priority—unlike a commercial or institutional operation,” Nyland confides. “But now it is a wonderful tool for teaching and we cannot imagine handling our recipe adjustment or procurement process without it.” The systems also can be utilized in menu planning, purchasing, inventory, automatic order



entry, production planning, forecasting, costing and control, nutritional labeling, as well as automated HACCP control.

Nyland adds that since the Foodservice Operations Management (FOM) is an educational grant, the university’s return was immediate. “As soon as it streamlined our processes and gave our students experience, we had great ROI!”

“Be sure the system does what you need it to do—what you are already doing, only faster and more accurately,” Nyland suggests to anyone looking to invest in a new kitchen management system. She also recommends considering technical support—the systems are extraordinarily complex and good support is critical, she says. Also, be patient, she warns. “Recognize it will take time to become functional—when planning with staff, and be sure they are ready for the ups and downs and time required to be fully functioning.” 