

CASE STUDY: Ignite Restaurant Group

Kitchen Innovations from QSR Automations Ignite the Guest Experience

By H. Rae Gibbons for *Nation's Restaurant News* Custom Media

The team behind Ignite Restaurant Group, owner and operator of the Joe's Crab Shack and Brick House Tavern + Tap concepts, understands that innovation is required to maximize matchless opportunities.

Joe's Crab Shack was launched after a road trip down the gulf coast evolved into a quirky seafood restaurant that always provides good times and good memories served with buckets of crab. There are now more than 100 Joe's locations across the United States. Brick House Tavern + Tap developed from a different sort of opportunity. Ignite realized that some of the locations they had in mind for new Joe's restaurants would be better fulfilled with a sports-themed restaurant. So the company launched Brick House, a neighborhood tavern dispensing happiness and comfort food to the common man. Proving successful, two short years have brought 11 Brick House restaurants with more on the way.

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Even in a down economy, Ignite isn't afraid to make investments when it comes to innovation. The company recently opted to implement a complete kitchen video software and hardware technology solution from QSR Automations, or QSR, developer of revolutionary guest management solutions for hospitality businesses worldwide – including kitchen automation, recipe viewer and seating and wait list management, as well as in-store, online, and mobile call-aheads and reservations.

Ignite is seeing the payoff through enhanced food quality, speedier ticket times, improved training and most importantly, more satisfied guests. “We made the decision to invest in our QSR kitchen video solution because we realized the system would pay for itself,” said Jim Kuhn, senior vice president of growth and technology.

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Previously, Ignite used antiquated printers in its kitchens, which made it hard to control food quality and provided no awareness of ticket times. The company chose to implement QSR’s ConnectSmart Kitchen (CSK) graphical software running with QSR’s reliable xCeed kitchen controllers along with a combination of QSR keypads and touch screen monitors.

QSR’s CSK automatically coordinates kitchen activities, displaying each item from a specific order at a specific kitchen station based on cook times, thus ensuring that all items from an order are completed simultaneously. With the CSK, food comes out of the kitchen on time and at the right temperature. After testing in its corporate lab, Ignite first put the solution in one Brick House location.

“We had a home run immediately after implementing QSR’s kitchen video technology, with an increase in food quality and a decrease in ticket times,” said Kuhn. “It was something we wanted to get in every restaurant as quickly as we could.”

Ignite has since implemented the QSR solution in all Brick House restaurants and is adding the technology in the Joe’s locations. Kuhn credits the foresight of Ignite’s leadership team for the decision to implement this new system in today’s economic climate.

“In this economy, it’s great that our company has made an investment to serve our team members and our guests even better,” stressed Kuhn. “Rather than just pushing our back-of-house team to perform better, we have given them the tools to do so. And, since QSR’s kitchen video technology is really the standard in casual dining kitchens, many of our chefs know the system, which makes training even easier.”

Kuhn served as Ignite’s vice president of operations for a number of years before moving to his current role, and his time in operations offered him specific insight into the restaurant group’s needs. Kuhn notes the importance of being prepared and relying on operations to ensure the success of technology projects. “You have to do the work up front, test properly and rely on your operations team. Our kitchen technology implementation has worked very well because our testing always included our operations team, who helped us determine the specific set up and timings for each of our restaurants.”

Prior to implementing QSR’s CSK, Ignite didn’t have the visibility needed to ensure that food items were timed appropriately. For example, if a table ordered a well-done steak and a shrimp dish, it was extremely difficult



to know that the two items were on the same order, so the shrimp might have completed 5-7 minutes before the steak. The CSK takes out the guesswork. And at the bar, the CSK prompts the bartender to prepare a frozen drink from a ticket prior to preparing a draft beer to ensure quality for both drinks. According to Kuhn, the results are quantifiable because, “the items for an order are all ready together, and they all go out to guests together, which has improved food quality.”

Ignite is taking advantage of the flexibility of the solution by relying on keypads at each of the preparation stations in the kitchen, and using touch at its expeditor stations and bar stations. The robust CSK also provides a graphical guide to creating and plating items through menu cards, which intuitively present recipe instructions for items on the kitchen and bar screens. The user-friendly, visual interface through menu cards simplifies the introduction of new menu items as well as aids in training new team members.

Kuhn notes that, “we have now put in recipe vision, so our team members see recipes and food placement, which invokes immediate confidence in what they are doing.”

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Looking ahead, Kuhn envisions other ways in which QSR can help Ignite enhance operations. Ignite is already testing QSR’s ConnectSmart TeamAssist software to take the company’s use of menu cards to the next level. With the addition of TeamAssist, Ignite can gain a robust database along with a browser-based interface for easily managing and presenting recipe information. For instance, fully integrated with QSR’s CSK, recipe information can be presented with TeamAssist in the specific manner that is most useful for that specific team member. An assembler will see the Expo View for a menu item, where information about presentation is provided. At the same time, a prep chef will see the Prep View for that same menu item, where information about ingredients and cooking procedures is most important. Ignite can also use TeamAssist to add more information for each menu card, such as prep and assembly instructions, ingredients, nutrition data, equipment used and notes.

The feedback since implementing QSR’s kitchen video solution has been positive for Ignite. Kuhn imparts that it is easy for them to measure the improvements that have resulted from the company’s investment because “our servers, managers and guests are all telling us the ticket times and food quality have improved.”

Once again, Ignite seized an opportunity and went after innovation, and the company’s team members and guests alike are enjoying the payoff.



QSR’s commitment to connectivity resonates throughout its in-store, online and mobile solutions. For more information visit their website at www.qsrautomations.com