

HUNGRY FOR TECHNOLOGY

Younger guests fall for technology hook, line and sinker

I was raised in the restaurant business and from my earliest years, I was taught that all good restaurants are built on food and service. Make no mistake — operations lacking these two fundamentals will not succeed. But today there is a third competency that the successful restaurateur must have at his or her command. When it comes to enhancing your guests' experience and building your brand, technology can and should play an important role. Take a look at how your customers — especially those in their 20s and 30s — are using technology:

- The U.S. has more than 219 million cell phone users.
- More than 650 million text messages are sent each day in North America.
- Apple has sold more than 110 million iPods to date.
- More than half of Americans have a MP3 or portable media player.
- 48 percent of Americans feel like computers and technology give them more control over their lives.

And, moreover, consider your local coffee houses. They're no longer just about pouring the best cup of coffee. Rather, providing ready access to surf the Internet and relaxed seating to tap away on a laptop equally defines the experience in that space.

At Legal Sea Foods, we work with new technologies to create a unique dining experience for our guests. For example, we are currently implementing a wireless strategy using the POS² handheld ordering application, iSIVA point-of-sale and Pay@Table credit card processing system from PAR (www.partech.com). POS² has helped us improve communications with the kitchen by sending orders more quickly and by putting real-time information

TECHNOLOGY EXPECTATIONS OF YOUNGER DEMOGRAPHICS

1 48 percent of Americans feel like technology gives them more control over their lives. This means that a significant portion of the population wants technology as part of the guest experience.

2 Younger demographics understand that technology both speeds and simplifies communications, as evidenced by the 650 million text messages sent daily in North America. They expect that restaurants will leverage technology to make their guest experience fast and efficient.

3 Using technology as a tool of efficiency is only part of the equation. Tech-savvy people have used technology to create a lifestyle for themselves. Restaurants that do the same and leverage technology to differentiate the guest experience will increase resonance with a younger guest base.

such as daily specials and eighty-sixed items directly in the servers' hands. As a result, service is more efficient and table turns are faster.

Like POS², Pay@Table helps support our service goals; however, our use of this solution also communicates something significant about our brand — the value we put on our relationship with our customers. Pay@Table brings credit card processing tableside, enabling our guests to settle their check without their card ever leaving their sight. As a result, opportunities for credit card fraud are virtually eliminated. Using this technology reinforces our message to our customers that their comfort, convenience and security are paramount to us.

Notice I'm not talking about IT only in terms of improving efficiencies. There's nothing wrong with the savings that can come from automating the right processes. However, when implemented properly and used effectively, technology can provide restaurants with a significant competitive advantage beyond cost reduction.

Case in point: A few years ago we decided it was time to cast a wider net and develop a new concept targeted toward a younger demographic. From the beginning, technology was an integral component of our market strategy and brand identity. Today LTK (Legal Test Kitchen) offers a high-tech environment for Gen Xers with sophisticated, electronically controlled lighting and sleek furnishings. Tableside iPod docking stations enable guests to listen to their own choice of music. Internet-enabled touch screens provide interactive access to menu information, community trivia and more. And, in addition, the restaurant makes use of our wireless ordering and payment solutions. Technology is an essential part of the brand experience.

Our technology strategy doesn't end at our restaurants' four walls. Our public Web site and e-commerce site offer more opportunities for guests to interact with and buy from Legal Sea Foods. So, too, a successful viral marketing campaign posted on YouTube helps reinforce our positioning as well as increase our resonance with a younger guest base.

The innovative use of the right technology can improve operational efficiencies as well as serve as an attractive differentiator in capturing new markets. Think about what technology can do for you, and you will find new ways to engage with your customers in an ever-changing world. **HT**



Roger Berkowitz is the president & CEO of Legal Sea Foods, which owns and operates 34 restaurants and a conference center located along the Eastern Seaboard. The restaurant group was recently named a Breakthrough Award winner for Overall Technology Innovation at Hospitality Technology's Restaurant Executive Summit in Scottsdale, Arizona.