



Table stakes: Automated kitchen management solution is upping the ante for efficient service



By James Tenser

Speedier and more accurate service is the name of the game at restaurant operations across the country. For QSR Automations, Inc., the trend first crystallized nearly four years ago when it won the contract to install its kitchen management solution at the Applebee's chain, replacing a prior paper-based customer order system.

Founded in 1996, QSR had its roots in the quick serve segment, and has also evolved to accommodate market convergence, says president and CEO Lee Leet. "We saw table service — and the growth of multi-concepts — as a vast untapped customer base, and we adjusted our game plan to include these markets."

Here's more of our exclusive interview:

Accuvia: Why are automated kitchen systems right for today's restaurant operator?

Leet: For many companies it's time to switch away from paper-based systems that require a highly-skilled human supervisor. QSR's solution is designed to be flexible enough to add value in any restaurant operation where speed, accuracy and timing are important.

Accuvia: So you believe the industry has been ripe for this innovation?

Lee: We think so. The ROI is evident within a few months, from the decrease in labor costs alone. Food comes to tables faster and hotter, which is a valuable intangible. You get better table turns.

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Accuvia: Briefly, how does your solution work in practice for table service?

Leet: Our system displays the pending order queue on a monitor. It calculates the start times for each item so all items in an order are completed at the same time. Simultaneously, it allows servers instant access to order status. It shows priority and rush times, and improves speed of service. One of our customers cut its average ticket times from about 10 to 8 minutes.

Accuvia: Is this costly to implement?

Leet: Our solution costs a little more to install than some competitors that use printers. But the ongoing paper and maintenance costs begin to balance out when you consider the one-year total cost of ownership. Add the data tracking capability that you gain with our system, and we think the value is strong. And, like many solution vendors, we are now using XML language to ensure future compatibility.

Accuvia: What kinds of insights are possible with the data tracking your system offers?

Leet: In quick serve, operators track service times; which stations are being prepared faster than others, etc. Since the data can be sent in real time to staff or over the Web to headquarters, it can drive a real-time application, displayed in any place in the restaurant, which monitors thresholds, such as drive-through time problems. This allows labor to be added to fix a short-term problem. Or, if a table service order has been in the kitchen too long or a plate dropped, it allows a manager to communicate with a customer about the service problem preemptively.

Accuvia: QSR emphasizes open technology standards. Why is this so important?

Leet: When an operator implements the QSR solution to take care of the kitchen, it allows them to leverage their current investments, such as point-of-sale (POS) systems, while immediately enhancing overall operations. As an example, Yum! Brands has utilized two different generations of POS touchscreen hardware and software over the past six years, and has stayed with QSR's solution. We've never had a customer use QSR's solution, and then later switch to a different kitchen management system. **SS**

Lee Leet is president and CEO of QSR Automations, Inc.