

chain leader

PROMOTION

Seating Satisfaction

Technology from QSR Automations streamlines reservations and wait times at Claim Jumper.

Many popular restaurants still rely on laminated floor plans with a grease pencil and a date book for table management and reservations. These methods require know-how and experience at the hostess stand, and often result in errors in wait time estimates and overbooking. Even with well-trained employees, such operational inefficiencies can result in dissatisfied guests.

Claim Jumper Restaurants, a 46-unit (and growing) business, now relies on a technology solution to eliminate guessing and maximize efficiencies. Claim Jumper's solution comes from QSR Automations and includes ConnectSmart Hostess for seating and wait list management, ConnectSmart WebAhead to enable guests to enter the wait list via the Internet, ConnectSmart Reservations, and ConnectSmart WebReserve for online reservations.



Wait times at high-volume, large-footprint Claim Jumper restaurants traditionally ran 30 to 90 minutes. A hostess, along with one or more seaters, had to regularly walk through the dining room with scrap paper and return to the hostess stand to update table statuses on a messy grease board. Ted Stathakis, Claim Jumper's vice president of technology, says the paper method worked well but it took a significant amount of experience to accurately guess wait times based on a formula involving number of guests in the restaurant, party sizes, day of the week and time of day.

"We're extremely excited that we're past all that, thanks to QSR's ConnectSmart table management solutions," says Stathakis. "The system now estimates wait times for the hostess based on criteria that we have defined coupled with real-time activities in the restaurant. What's more, guests aren't seated at a table that's still being bussed, and guests who waited for a table aren't pondering the empty ones as they are being seated."

Stathakis adds, "We are seeing higher guest satisfaction from more accurate wait times—and less guests walking away because we aren't quoting excessive wait times. And all of the added efficiencies have really improved our table turns."

Knowing that there is an entire guest demographic that refuses to wait very long for a table or will only go where reservations are available, Claim Jumper also added reservations and online bookings to its guest services. "With QSR's solutions, we can now make even more guests even more satisfied," says Stathakis. "Our guests can choose to walk in to our restaurant and either be quickly seated or be quoted an accurate wait time. Or they can call us for the same day or a future day, or go on the Web to get their spot on the wait list or to make a reservation."

Says Stathakis, "So now we have these wonderful tools from QSR to improve our business processes and expand the services we can offer. Plus, the information we can collect on our guests and our operations is really exciting."

Claim Jumper managers and corporate team members all benefit from the solution's data-capture and reporting capabilities. For instance, a manager will know right away if there is a variance in quoted wait times versus actual wait times and can take immediate action, while corporate can use the same information to adjust

wait time calculations overall.

"Not even mentioning that the technology base behind the product is fantastic, the solution is easy to install and easy to use," says Stathakis. "We pre-stage the hardware, drop ship it to the restaurant for the installer, send out an area supervisor to provide training in the morning, and we're live by lunch."

All Claim Jumper restaurants are scheduled to complete their installations by the end of this year, and exploring QSR's kitchen automation technology is next on the horizon. With QSR's ConnectSmart Kitchen (CSK) graphical software, stress is reduced and food quality is enhanced. Each item within an order is routed to a specific kitchen station for preparation based on the cook times of all items within an order, ensuring that all items complete at the same time. The CSK also offers graphical menu cards and web-based access in the kitchen.

"The potential for business intelligence is amazing, especially when we can start using data from the front of house along with our production information in our analyses," Stathakis says, adding that Claim Jumper hopes to begin CSK testing in the coming months. "With QSR's ConnectSmart, we'll be able to tell how much large parties truly need to add to our wait time estimates, how the kitchen can improve food production and even if our menu mix is too heavy on certain items."

Concludes Stathakis, "In an industry where same-store sales are down for almost everyone, we still have guests who are willing to wait to dine, and the addition of QSR's ConnectSmart technology is going straight to helping us enhance the entire dining experience we can offer."

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