

## Define and redesign key to competition: Foodservice operators gain edge with tools from QSR

*By Mina Williams*

HOSPITALITY SYSTEMS — INCLUDING KITCHEN MANAGEMENT — ARE at a crossroads. Technology and information are now giving foodservice executives visibility and control over operations. However, multiple hardware pieces are crowding kitchens and back offices. Some restaurants find themselves with eight personal computers in the back office taking up valuable space, and not holding up in the unforgiving hospitality environment.

As foodservice executives define and redesign the IT solutions in their arsenal, more and more operators are seeking the flexibility factor that technology and information can bring to the battle of the bottom line.

QSR Automations Inc., a designer and manufacturer of automation hardware and software for the hospitality industry, has just launched the eXpert hospitality controller. This new product is targeted at hospitality companies of all sizes and concepts, along with multi-concept operations, as they strive to meet business objectives through automation.

### **Customized power**

Using a Microsoft Windows XP Embedded operating system, the eXpert hospitality controller brings super resiliency to the table. The resulting customized operating system image, selected from more than 10,000 components, running virtually any hospitality application, gives foodservice executives select functionality along with a substantially reduced footprint.

The eXpert hospitality controller propels operators out of a monolithic operating system and into separate components. These individually selected components, including Windows Media Player or Internet Explorer services and drivers, customize the hardware to become more than the average hospitality management tool. In the kitchen, graphics and multi-media functionality can be used to illustrate kitchen consistency in anything from plating presentation to menu design. The multi-media components can be put to work to run training segments at any or all stations.

### **Flexible flexibility**

As the needs of individual operations progress, software applications have evolved to meet those needs. Operators with their own suite of applications can run them with the powerful eXpert hospitality controller, which offers an open, standards-based platform. For kitchen management, menus, plating designs, recipes and even a mini help desk for troubleshooting, the operator's equipment can be tapped to streamline operations.

Lee Leet, president and chief executive officer for QSR, said, "Today's foodservice executive wants to use hardware for multiple tasks. Savvy



operators need unique solutions that support convergence — providing the ability to communicate and interact across the enterprise to enhance the guest experience. They are looking for hardware that can handle graphics and powerful, feature-rich, open applications such as sophisticated kitchen automation and advanced hostess, labor and table management.”

### Space savers built tough

Shifting to hardware that can multi-task not only deflates crowding, but it decreases maintenance issues as well. The new eXpert controller has the ability to run any 32-bit Windows-based software application, providing a robust and affordable alternative to larger computers that may not be able to withstand the water and grease-filled environment of a foodservice operation. The eXpert powers third-party software solutions, including table management, inventory, labor, e-mail and Web-based applications, sparing highly coveted space in both the front-of-the-house and back-of-the-house.

Along with its technical aspects, the eXpert hospitality controller is physically designed to meet the needs of the harsh food-service environment:

- Solid, extruded aluminum enclosure with several mounting options.
- No fans or moving parts.
- External locking power connector, along with Ethernet, video, serial, dual USB, PS/2 and speaker connections.

### Graphically speaking

To meet the empowered graphic ability that the eXpert affords foodservice operators, QSR has designed an innovative software solution, the ConnectSmart Kitchen (CSK). With its robust features, the CSK capitalizes on the eXpert’s capabilities, enabling operators to customize graphical views at each station and dynamically display menu cards. The ability to graphically demonstrate how to build a menu item brings to the back-of-the-house cooking line a tool to provide training and maintain

consistency. Restaurants with the ability to display menu cards can easily introduce new products with the assurance that the products will be presented to guests in a congruous fashion across an entire chain. In addition, graphic capabilities further enhance an operator’s ability to use colors and symbols in order to improve order accuracy, labor efficiency and training.

The CSK enables operators to use specific colors, fonts, icons and other visual cues, including arrows and symbols, already within the corporate culture. With these visuals readily recognized by employees, the software layers on existing processes to dovetail easily with existing training components. The use of different sized fonts can increase the amount of information presented on one viewing screen at individual identified stations, or within certain parts of a specific view. This flexibility gives foodservice operators the ability to deliver the appropriate message in a meaningful fashion to targeted workstations.

Through its eXpert hospitality controller and ConnectSmart Kitchen, QSR Automations is equipping foodservice operators with the tools they need to define store automation, and to redesign the technology for the perfect fit in their operation. ☰

