

CASE STUDY: FLIX BREWHOUSE

Brews, Blockbusters and Rugged Tablets for Big Customer Service

Challenge

Flix Brewhouse needed a durable compact mobile device with low failure rates after experiencing multiple failures with competitors' solutions.

Solution

Flix Brewhouse deployed 120 Panasonic Toughpad® FZ-M1 tablets in three locations and has plans to roll out another 40 at a fourth location by the end of 2017. The tablets give servers the ability to open a tab, take orders, deliver bill folios, and close-out checks – all without interrupting movie watching.

Result

After the highly successful, seven-month deployment of the Toughpad FZ-M1 tablets, Flix Brewhouse has experienced less than a 1% failure rate, along with the desired — and proven — increase in service speed, up about 3% with improved customer experience in all metrics.

Six years ago, a brewery and restaurant opened its doors in Round Rock, Texas, a fast-growing community near Austin. There, Flix Brewhouse welcomed people with craft beers, fresh and familiar food and provided them a special treat – blockbuster movies. And that made Flix Brewhouse a trendsetter.

Today upscale dining at the movies is sweeping across the U.S., according to Nation's Restaurant News, which reports that foodservice spending at movie theaters has risen 20 percent compared with a year ago. "Many major movie-theater chains now offer full chef-driven menus complete with alcoholic beverages and seat-side service," according to the article.

From its early success in Round Rock, Flix Brewhouse has expanded to Albuquerque, Des Moines and the Indianapolis area, and has plans to open 15 locations by 2020.

Great customer service is helping to fuel that growth. A year ago, Matthew Baizer was on a mission when he took to the floor at the National Restaurant Association trade show. As COO of Flix Brewhouse, Mr. Baizer had worked with his staff to identify the company's needs in serving its customers in its unique operating environment.



Identifying the problem

A top priority was finding a device to serve patrons while interrupting the movie experience as little as possible. He knew tablets would simplify the serving process, but he knew the tablet needed specific features to suit the brewhouse's needs.

"We needed a feature-packed tablet that would integrate with our existing network infrastructure and most importantly to have ruggedization – and to last – without trading off features," Mr. Baizer says.

It was at the show's Panasonic booth that he saw potential. Panasonic, the integrated solutions partner, creates technologies that move us toward a better life and a better world. We do this by creating breakthrough innovations across a broad set of disruptive technologies including IOT, Robotics, AI, Advanced Materials as well as emerging technologies. And as we have for almost a century, we do this for a single purpose: to make life more fulfilling and the world a more enjoyable and sustainable place.

Simplifying, speeding orders

First and foremost, Mr. Baizer says, was the company's need for a magnetic stripe reader for swiping credit cards. This would simplify the order process by allowing customers to open tabs at the beginning of the film and close them at the end with minimal disruption to the experience.

"We wanted to open tabs at seats and eliminate the issue of a server having to go into [the theater] to collect credit cards after dropping checks," he says. Not only does round-trip credit card processing interrupt the movie for both the guest and adjacent patrons but servers incur extra time to use fixed POS terminals outside the auditorium.

"Without a magnetic stripe reader, you're adding on about 800 footsteps. If the server can open a tab at the beginning of the experience, they could theoretically leave after unobtrusively dropping the check and voucher and never have to go back," he says.

Mr. Baizer also needed a product that would last. Flix Brewhouse had tried three times to integrate tablets into its workflow. Most recently, it had employed consumer tablets that had been given an extra protective cover. These enhancements doubled the life of the businesses' tablets by extending life expectancy by six months. It was still not long enough. "Even with all that rubber on its side, if you dropped it just right, the screen would crack," he says.

Flix also wanted an easy way to remove and replace batteries from tablets without shutting down the tablet itself. In the trade this is known as "hot-swappable battery." "There's nothing worse than being in a transaction in the middle of one of our auditoriums and losing battery in the middle of serving a guest," Mr. Baizer says. "It causes absolute fits."

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Chief Operating Officer
Flix Brewhouse

Customizing the solution

After considerable research, Mr. Baizer chose the Panasonic Toughpad FZ-M1 7" tablet and collaborated with the company for a customizable solution. With the Panasonic rugged tablets, Flix Brewhouse now has hot-swappable batteries, a magnetic stripe reader that allows them to open tabs at the table and a long life-span.

"We have an extended warranty, even for accidental breakage," he says. "We know that for the next three years we're going to have zero maintenance and replacement costs."

Tracking the impact

Flix Brewhouse implemented its first Panasonic tablets in Round Rock in September 2016 and has rolled the technology out to two more locations. Its Carmel, Indiana brewhouse will operate on Panasonic tablets by the end of 2017. At that point, all four locations will have 40 units each.

Every week, Flix Brewhouse surveys 25 percent of its guests on their experience. The company has seen significant increases over the last six months, according to Mr. Baizer. "We've seen our guest satisfaction and speed of service scores escalate a lot," he says. Mr. Baizer says the overall experience rating is up more than 2 points while the speed of beverage service is up nearly 10 points. This is because the servers no longer spend time walking in and out to pick up credit cards and drop vouchers back for signature, he says.

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Flix Brewhouse also runs call-light reports to measure speed of service. It's another area where the company has seen improvement since adopting Panasonic tablets. A green light means the customer received service in less than 3 minutes, a yellow light means 3 to 5 minutes and a red light means it took longer than 5 minutes.

"We are less than one percent red lights now," Mr. Baizer says. "When we started this with the old system, we were about five percent red lights."

Summary

Flix Brewhouse had pin-pointed its problem: The movie theater and full service restaurant wanted to leverage new technology so that its servers could more efficiently serve its guests. Having originally tried two separate third party options, the brewhouse had even identified the features its technology would need to be successful.

Of these features, the most important were a hot-swappable battery, ruggedization, and a magnetic stripe reader that would allow servers to process credit card payments right at the guests seat in the theater.

Eventually, Flix Brewhouse discovered all of its solutions in the Panasonic Toughpad FZ-M1 tablet.

After rolling out the technology in three of their four current locations, the brewhouse was able to illustrate statistical improvements in customer satisfaction, speed of service and other metrics. The company now plans to roll out the FZ-M1 tablet to its Carmel, Indiana location by the end of 2017 as well as the other locations Flix Brewhouse plans to open in the near future.

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