

Restaurant franchisee enjoying taste of digital menu board success

Culver's may typically offer quick service, but at one restaurant in the system, the franchisees didn't think dine-in customers were spending enough time placing their orders.

Zach Steffens and his father Mike, owners of a Culver's in Palatine, Ill., began shopping around for a digital menu board system after realizing their customers were only taking 30 or so seconds to place an order.

"It didn't seem like enough time to go over the entire menu," Zach Steffens said. Their Culver's, for example, features more than 50 menu items, constantly changing daily specials, soup specials and "Flavor of the Day" custards.

At issue were their static menu boards, which couldn't communicate all of this information without additional effort.

"It would take 10 minutes to change one item out of a static board. You have to take the board down, pull the information off, stick the new information on, get the ruler out to make sure it fits, and hang the board back up," Steffens said.

The daunting process wasn't always feasible for the busy restaurant operators. So, they began checking out digital boards in other nearby restaurants and, in February, installed a system that fit their needs and budget (**LG Electronics USA's** EzSign TV).

Their digital boards come with templates that can be changed to update daily specials with photos. They select a template, upload a picture, update the text and export the information to a USB

drive. If the Steffens want to do something outside of the rotating specials, they can add it in "about a minute," according to Zach Steffens.

The operators installed two EzSign boards, one to replace the unit's static daily specials board, and the other to display menu items and run a corporate DVD featuring different food promotions and timely Culver's marketing campaigns.

The Palatine store's two interior 42-inch LED backlit models. The EzSign system is specifically designed for deployments of five or fewer displays, and can showcase branded messaging alongside broadcast television. The package includes software with more than 50 templates that can be customized with proprietary images and text.

Steffens expects more franchisees in the Culver's system, as well as the quick-service segment in general, to adopt digital menu boards sooner than later.

"They're becoming less expensive, and I believe that cost is driving the market right now," he said. "I also think more people will start to see the benefits of having this type of system in place."

Realizing the benefits of the new boards

Those benefits were realized almost immediately by the Steffens. Not only was their Culver's able to display more menu items than ever before, the entire process is easier, Zach Steffens said.

"Additionally, for customers, it's a much cleaner look, and it's easier for them to find items. We are still hearing compliments about the upgrades," he said. "People like the picture quality and

the more modern, contemporary look these boards bring to the restaurant."

The boards have benefited the bottom line as well. For example, Steffens said his unit has experienced a 10 percent growth in BBQ Pork Sandwich sales since installing the digital boards.

"We didn't have the item up anywhere before we got the boards because we didn't have any space. Now we have it up with a picture, and that is what has made the difference," he said.

To further measure the results from his new system, Steffens advertised a buy-one-get-one-free double cheeseburger deal only on the new boards.

"The Monday before we did this promotion, we sold 10. The next Monday, after it was put up on the boards, we sold 52," he said. "I didn't advertise the deal anywhere else. I wanted to be sure they were working, the results were concrete, and I am now sure."