

WATERPARK FOOD FACILITIES



FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The food facilities of the future will need to be run lean and flexible in order to take advantage of a somewhat captive audience. Guests don't necessarily come to waterparks to visit your fine food and beverage establishments; rather, they come for the fun and the thrill of sliding down 60-foot waterslides, of getting shot by water cannons or simply just to relax in a chaise lounge reading the latest Tom Clancy novel. That said, don't make them go elsewhere when hunger strikes.

What are some of the ways we can run a successful operation? How do we increase the average amount of dollars the guest spends? These were just some of the questions we had when we helped plan and open our latest project—The Splash at Fossil Trace, located in Golden, Colorado, not more than a 10-minute drive from the famous Coors brewery.

The Splash at Fossil Trace—A CASE STUDY

Our goal was to develop a concept that was both efficient and adaptable. By adaptable, we mean being able to change with the food trends, adding and or deleting items as necessary. As for adaptability, we looked at equipment that was multifunctional, serving the needs of several menu items. The outdoor gas BBQ grill we chose can be used to cook the traditional fare of hamburgers, hot dogs and chicken. It also can be used to make grilled cheese sandwiches and to warm tortillas by adding a removable griddle on top of a grill section.

Creative menu planning was also a challenge, finding ways to combine existing food items to create a whole new item or to enhance an existing entrée while at the same time not bogging down the system. For instance, we could serve both plain salads and salads with sliced broiled chicken (the same chicken already being used for chicken sandwiches). We could use the nacho cheese sauce to top pretzels and hotdogs. In both instances, we added nothing extra to our inventory, but we were able to increase incremental profits for these items by "upgrading" what the guests were already going to buy. Another advantage of this practice is that you are able to turn your inventory on items that may otherwise expire.

The design and layout go a long way in supporting an efficient operation. Don't think that McDonalds designs its kitchen space without careful consideration of the workflow as it relates to the menu. Many countless "man in motion" studies take place before even the smallest piece of equipment is positioned. In Golden, we didn't go quite to this extreme; however, we did analyze the menu and performed storyboard-type dry-runs on product assembly to see how the process would flow through the kitchen, over the counter and to the eating area. This exercise proved valuable in identifying proper placement of equipment, sinks, shelving and counter space. This also helped to insure that we had adequate power, gas and water service to the proper areas.

We've all heard the term "think outside the box." In Golden, we took it somewhat literally. We realize that our scope of operation goes beyond the kitchen walls, and therefore, we took a hard look at what we could do to enhance guest satisfaction in a self-serving way. We examined the line queues for effective use of the guests' time while waiting. We used an adjustable roping system, similar to that of amusement parks, using a zigzag pattern, which would allow those in line to be in full close-up view of the menu board, thus helping to eliminate indecisiveness and cut down on transaction time once they arrived at the counter. We also decided that during peak times, it was advantageous to have a knowledgeable employee taking orders on paper chits or tickets. This helped to expedite the line and gave us one-on-one contact with the guest.



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We then switched our attention to the dining area. We tried to make a habit of visiting guests in an unobtrusive manner to solicit feedback and to observe what was being eaten and what was left behind. This helped us to determine if portion sizes were adequate or if we had any quality issues. We felt that if there was a problem, we could address it before they went home and told their "proverbial" 10 friends and family members. It is our feeling that if you lose a guest in food and beverage, you lose them in the park! Remember, bathers don't come to waterparks for the food; however, the food can chase them away.

In examining the business aspect of the operation, we set up a series of controls and programs that would help the management team manage the numbers. Unlike a Fortune 500 company, we scratch and scrape for "penny profits." If managed properly, these pennies can add up to a profitable operation. The first step in determining cost efficiency was to go over the menu and calculate a "theoretical food and paper cost," an actual number derived from the preparation and presentation of a given item with a minimum of waste and a maximum of yield. We can then compare this number to actual food costs. With today's technology, many cash register systems can churn out daily or weekly reports showing the actual number of each item sold. Knowing this, we are then able to insert our theoretical figures to calcu-

late a theoretical Cost of Goods Sold (COGS). By comparing the actual with the theoretical we are able to see the variance and determine if it is within acceptable range—1-1.5 percent. We recommend this type of analysis on a weekly basis to allow the operator to catch any problems before the season is over. (An in-depth study of food costs is beyond the scope of this article and can be addressed in future issues.)

Lastly, but by no means least importantly, we addressed the hiring practices. The Human Resources staff at Golden was pretty much in step with our philosophy of hiring smiles. A good manager should be able to teach employees the mechanics of the job. It is, however, not as easy to train someone to smile. Give me a handful of motivated and cheerful teenagers, and I'll conquer the industry! It may sound like a cliché but your employees are your most valuable asset—treat them that way. The renown corporate motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar, once said, "You get what you want out of life by helping enough other people get what they want." So help your staff get what they want. Be accommodating to their needs. Work around their schedules as much as is practical. Remember, this is not necessarily a career for them.

Did we meet our objectives in Golden? At the halfway point of the season, the numbers look encouraging. Will changes need to be made? Of course. After all, this is not a static entity but rather a dynamic, evolving and seemingly living being, requiring constant attention and diligence. We feel that the design principles incorporated in Golden will allow for growth and expansion for many years to come. 



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