In this report, we dive into data from the Restaurant Social Media Index, providing research that connects the dots between consumer behavior and sentiment in relation to multi-unit operators and speed of service.
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THE TIME IS NOW YESTERDAY
Do you remember a time when sending a letter through the USPS wasn’t considered nostalgic? These days, we refer to it as snail mail and barely take the time to sit down and actually write a letter (even emailing as we know it will continue to evolve). If you think about it, almost everything we have become accustomed to in the modern age has evolved because of one major common thread: We have become a society reliant on the need for simpler, faster, and more efficient processes to fit our ever-changing mobile lifestyles. While some would argue that the rise of customizable, personalized technology has made us more impersonal with each other in real life (IRL), there are a plethora of benefits to this progressive landscape, especially for businesses. Such can be said for the restaurant industry, a $665 billion business that now, in 2014, makes up 47 percent of the food dollar in the U.S., according to the National Restaurant Association.

THE NEED FOR SPEED

Speed of service has always been a prevalent, foundational element for restaurants. Timeliness directly affects a customer’s perception of a good or bad experience with a brand, whether they consciously correlate it or not, and could be the differentiating factor of whether a customer chooses to return or not. According to DigitalCoCo’s proprietary Restaurant Social Media Index (RSMI), there were 11.6 million social media mentions from consumers in regards to speed of service related sentiment in the first two quarters of 2014. The RSMI tracks data across 17 social media platforms from a total of 7.8 million U.S. consumers either engaging with or talking about the Top 250 RSMI Brands. (You can check out the RSMI Top 250 Brands for Q2 here.)
While consumer perception of speed varies in accordance to perceived value and type of restaurant, there is no denying that speed is one of the leading factors of a successful guest experience, specifically for fast food and fast casual restaurants. According to Technomic’s Consumer Brand Metrics Q2 2013 report, “ninety-five percent of consumers said friendly service is an important factor when they’re choosing a fast casual restaurant, versus 90 percent who said the same with respect to fast food restaurants. However, for both segments, 90 percent of the customers said service speed is important in their restaurant selection.”

CHANGING PACE: PUTTING THE ‘FAST’ IN FAST CASUAL

The fast casual segment is roughly a $50 billion industry with nearly 500-600 brands under its umbrella. It continues to be the fastest growing segment in the restaurant industry, and it’s easy to see why. Fast casual concepts offer higher quality ingredients than fast food menus do, while still keeping speed of service in mind.

In fact, Darren Tristano, EVP at Technomic, indicated that part of the reason why pizza is the next fast casual primed for growth is its speediness, saying, “With more than 62,000 units and $35 billion in sales annually in the U.S., is limited-service pizza a growth segment? What about the full-service pizzeria chains and independents? It may not be about the pizza. It may be more about the speed of service, convenience and the freshness of the pizza.”

This fast casual equation keeps on-the-go customers happy, while still playing into diners’ growing preference of eating healthier and more transparently when it comes to food quality and allowing them to do so at a lower price point than casual restaurants.
Fast casuals speak to Millennials on different levels, and its operators think beyond just food quality and service — they consider the whole experience. This translates to more willingness of technology implementation, both in and out of store, which also directly impacts speed of service. According to a Long Range Systems white paper, The Millennial Mindset: How a Generation is Reshaping Hospitality, “Good, fresh food might be the easy part of serving this group. Fast can be difficult, given the quality fast casuals are trying to pull off.”

MILLENNIALS: UNLOCKING THE SECRET INGREDIENT

There’s much speculation in the media about Millennials: What makes this group tick? What do they want? Why do they want everything now? And a personal favorite: Why do Millennials feel so entitled? The thing about pigeonholing the largest generation to-date is that it leaves a lot of room for inaccuracy. Perhaps that’s part of the reason big data has become integral for any business today — to accurately measure habits based on action versus assumption. Obviously, this type of information gathering isn’t to cater just to Millennials, but to all generations. However, Millennials make up a significant part of the dining demographic. According to “The Millennial Mindset: How a Generation is Reshaping Hospitality,” “Millennials dine out more than older generations, averaging four meals a week at restaurants.” And, according to Retail Leader, who defines the group as those between the ages of 17 and 34, the buying power of Millennials is huge: Beginning in 2017, they’re expected to spend more than $200 billion annually and $10 trillion in their lifetimes. While they don’t have the most buying power now, it’s extremely important — vital, even — for restaurant brands to be marketing toward Millennials.
TOP 10 RSMI BRANDS FOR SPEED

The list below is made up of the Top 10 brands that social consumers believe have higher quality or faster speed of service than others. Unlike the overall sentiment we usually use for brands in the RSMI, for the purpose of this report, we only tracked the speed of service component, which was based on the extraction of 22,698 brand service terms in the Index, for Q1 and Q2 2014 combined.

1 STARBUCKS

With a Sentiment Score of 82.9, Starbucks takes the lead in speed. The super caffeinated brand may have long lines (especially during the pre-work rush), but consumer perception remains positive. And, just as a reminder: just because there’s a line doesn’t mean it’s necessarily a slow one. The fact that Starbucks ranks No. 1 may be a surprise to some considering the brand has rapidly expanded its product offerings, including more food and pastries. In 2010, Starbucks implemented guidelines that limits staff to only make two beverages at a time to ensure efficiency and accuracy — and to maintain customer engagement, we assume. Starbucks claimed the new drink-making method would ensure beverage production at a more consistent pace. Psychologically, this is a great way to maintain speed of service perception, and exemplifies the importance of consistent employee training.

As reported in a Wall Street Journal article back in 2010, “Baristas say it can take
anywhere from 30 seconds to a minute to make an espresso-based drink, depending on the complexity of the drink and the barista’s skill.”

Since that time, Starbucks has expanded its offerings, most of which are displayed in front of the counter for guests to browse while they wait in line. This may have some impact on speed perception because it gives guests something to do while they wait, which brings us to the next point. Starbucks has always been a forward-thinking company, including its incorporation of tech to streamline processes and create loyalty. In fact, it was one of the first food brands to create a Chief Digital Officer position (we’re looking at you, Adam Brotman) that focuses on how to implement technology and innovation in relation to building and maintaining social consumer relationships. A perfect example of this is Starbucks’ highly acclaimed app, which allows customers to sync up their Starbucks card to earn rewards, pay for their orders via mobile, and even view their transaction history (a quick, effective way to remember that drink you loved when you finally decided to try something new last month). Starbucks offers a robust experience for its customers, especially for a coffeehouse.

2 MCDONALD’S

The Golden Arches brand comes in second with a Speed Sentiment Score of 80.4. In April 2013, McDonald’s rolled out a new dual-point ordering system to better streamline its ordering process. It includes an overhead screen that matches a number on the customer’s receipt, notifying them when their order is ready. This allows guests to move about freely or sit at a table while waiting for their food.

In other words, the new system doesn’t require guests to hover around the register area while waiting. In addition to the new ordering system, the VP of Business Research at McDonald’s, Steve Levigne, announced in November’s investor
meeting that the brand will also address speed of service issues by putting $3 billion toward new preparation tables, drive-thru windows, and a “runner” position, which would allow cashiers to continue to take new orders instead of seeing the order delivery process through. The idea for these solutions came about after McDonald’s experienced its largest quarterly margin decline in more than 10 years, and also as a result of the brand’s speed of service averaging the slowest it’s seen in 15 years (189.49 seconds). With its No. 2 ranking, it seems these efforts are working.

As far as local markets go, a McDonald’s location in Pennsylvania has replaced its playground with tableside touchscreen games, which also caters to older customers with games like Solitaire. This would certainly make wait times more enjoyable and seem quicker. In its Columbus, GA market, McDonald’s is testing an ordering app for smartphones. While this proves the Golden Arches brand is staying up with the times in order to align with tech-savvy Millennials, the system seems too “clunky” because guests aren’t able to actually place an order via mobile unless they are at one of the McDonald’s mobile ordering stations. Consumers placing orders must scan a QR code, which then sends the order to the kitchen. It seems as though this may be a case of “technology just for technology’s sake,” which all businesses should stay away from. If we had to guess, this new mobile ordering system will, in fact, slow customers’ wait times down, rather than speed them up.

3 PANERA BREAD

Despite media claims of Panera being “too slow for fast casual success” back in October, the brand files in at No. 3 with a Speed Sentiment Score of 79.1. In the beginning of Q2 2014, Panera announced an overhaul with what the media dubbed “Panera 2.0,” which aims to cut down on cashiers in replacement of kiosks. Panera CEO Ron Shaich told Bloomberg Businessweek that he would not be cutting employees, saying counter staff would now focus more on bringing food to customers’ tables.
According to an article in The American Genius, once a guest places their order at a kiosk, they will take a locator and seat themselves. “When you take the locator, it sends a signal to the kitchen/server indicating which table you are sitting at using the ‘table tracker’ system. Basically, it is a mini tracking device, locking on to the tag underneath the table. The Panera server will bring your food to you; no more getting up to grab it when your name/number is called,” the publication reported.

This tech-driven makeover was sparked by speed of service and the overall guest experience as consumer behavior continues to evolve in the digital age. Panera Bread announced that by 2016, there will be kiosks in all of the restaurant’s locations. The brand is also enabling guests to control their own orders via mobile and online ordering. This minimizes order errors, which, as you can imagine, slows the flow down. Shaich told Businessweek, “The dirty little secret in the food industry is one in seven orders are wrong. We’re one in ten, a little better than average. Half of those inaccuracies happen during order input.”

4 CHIPOTLE

Fast casual king Chipotle, known for revolutionizing a model not seen before, comes in with a Speed Sentiment Score of 78.4. According to its Founder and co-CEO Steve Ells, some of Chipotle’s fastest restaurants run upwards of 350 transactions each hour during the lunchtime rush. “We know we have a lot of room to get faster,” he said. Ells’ plan to increase speed includes four pillars: Expeditors, who tie up loose ends, like bagging your food and getting your drink; Linebackers, who patrol bins of food and countertops, “so the ones who are actually serving customers never turn their backs on them”; Mise en place, which ensures everything is stocked and in its place before rush hours hit; and Aces in their places, which ensures the top dogs of burrito mastery are in the field during peak hours, so service line is not slowed down by those in training.
As for technology, Chipotle has an impressive mobile app that includes features like mobile ordering and mobile payments, and it keeps an inventory of past orders for quick reordering.

5 **SHAKE SHACK**

Danny Meyer’s Shake Shack clips just behind Chipotle with a Speed Sentiment Score of 78.1. Speed of service is promised in their “Shack Pact,” noting, “We will practice the Excellence Reflex, never compromise quality, and ensure that the food we serve is as good as humanly possible as we balance speed of service and excellence of presentation.” While there are various Shake Shack locations spanning the east coast, its HQ in Madison Square Park (NYC) has its own Shack Cam, accessible online and through its mobile app, that allows potential guests the ability to see the line without actually being there. Talk about convenience!

6 **Mcalister’s Deli**

With a Speed Sentiment Score of 76.4, McAlister’s Deli comes in at No. 6. According to a Case Study, by using QSR Automations ConnectSmart Kitchen technology, McAlister’s has been able to shave average ticket times, said Kerry Newell, Sr. Manager of POS at McAlister’s. Because the chain sees its highest volume during lunch — about 70 percent of business occurs during this two-and-a-half hour window — speed is key for customer satisfaction.
The ConnectSmart Kitchen system allows each individual kitchen station (sandwiches, salads, soups, spuds) to focus only on their dishes, while streamlining all orders into one system for management to ensure efficiency. Orders are color-coded to quickly figure out what’s taking too long, which can clue management in on employee skill and which menu items are a hit (or not) on specific days of the week.

7 WENDY’S

When it comes to its drive-thru, Wendy’s is known for speed. RSMI data shows the burger chain’s Speed Sentiment Score is currently riding at a 75.8. According to QSR Magazine’s Drive-Thru Performance Study, Wendy’s hit a record of becoming the top speed performer in 2003 with a drive-thru time of 116.2. In 2009 and 2012, the fast food chain topped the speed list yet again with 134.1 seconds and 129.75 seconds, respectively. It has consistently remained tops for drive-thru speed in comparison to five other big national brands, including Taco Bell, Burger King, McDonald’s, Chick-fil-A, and Krystal. According to the study, Wendy’s SVP of Communications Denny Lynch says the brand pays attention to the little details that ultimately contribute to speed. “For example, something seemingly negligible like the position of the fridge door handle can affect the speed with which a crew member can get food out of the window.” Lynch also stresses the importance of having all necessary supplies in place — and close by — for when the rush hits.
Surprised to see a casual dining chain in the mix? With a Speed Sentiment Score of 73.1, Applebee’s was quick to realize it would have to keep up with the fast casual segment by implementing more technology and providing a better quality experience to diners. Throughout 2014, Applebee’s has initiated a record rollout of 100,000 E la Carte Presto tablets on each table — including at the bar — in nearly 2,000 of its locations. “The device puts control of the restaurant experience in the hands of our guests,” said Applebee’s President Mike Archer. “Speed of payment is the first thing that guests will notice.” It’s important to note that Applebee’s also offers Carside to Go at select locations, where diners can call ahead and orders will be brought out to them. Otherwise, it’s standard call-ahead, in-store pick-up.

Jason’s Deli holds a Speed Sentiment Score of 70.7. The chain began implementing Long Range Systems (LRS) Table Tracker system into its operations to improve food delivery times. With an RFID system, food runners are able to quickly pinpoint where diners are sitting to ensure food gets delivered faster. The LRS Table Tracker technology, which we will dive into more in the Case Study further below, is both operation- and consumer-facing, and uses big data to provide important insight to operators.
RED ROBIN

With a Speed Sentiment Score of 68.4, the full-service burger brand has partnered with UniFocus to implement a more efficient Labor Management System that aims to improve things like speed. According to a press release, the system “forecasts daily and weekly business volumes, ensuring proper staffing thru out [sic] the day to meet customer demand. The applications incorporate changes in the menu mix reflecting what guests are buying, and assigns the appropriately skilled and necessary labor. The right employee will be in the right place at the right time. The cloud-based resource management modules seamlessly function together to boost employee output.”

It’s interesting to note that Jimmy John’s, which centers its “Freaky Fast” branding around speed of service, did not make the Top 10 list. There’s a strong chance its slogan could be hurting the brand — consumer perception is probably at an all-time high because customers expect speed before even placing an order.

In fact, for a student research project at Virginia Tech, 183 students between the ages of 19 and 22 were surveyed on a variety of questions to ultimately answer “Is the Jimmy John’s ‘Freaky Fast’ campaign effectively increasing consumers’ purchase intent?” According to the research, when survey volunteers were asked about overall takeout importance — before they were made aware of the Jimmy John’s component — price ranked first, followed by taste, and then delivery time.

When the students were later asked to rank the same criteria about Jimmy John’s specifically, people ranked delivery time as most important, followed by taste, and then by price.
FASTER DELIVERY, PLEASE!

As stated above, consumer perception of speed of service depends on a variety of things, including industry segment and perceived value. Fast food diners, for example, would probably (hopefully!) expect quicker service than those dining at a casual or fine dining restaurant.

SERVICE TIME EXPECTATIONS

To gauge a proper estimate of service time expectations, “Rock My Restaurant” co-hosts and FCSI restaurant consultants Bill Bender and Eric Norman report that QSRs should aim for a target between 90 seconds and three minutes. For fast casuals, it’s four to five minutes; casual dining concepts clock in at 12 to 14 minutes; and for fine dining/destination dining, 30 minutes and up is acceptable.
SEEEKING IMPROVED SPEED OF SERVICE

Through the RSMI, we pulled social mentions of consumers — by generation — who vocalized dissatisfaction of speed in relation to fast casual, casual dining, and QSR experiences. To grab this data, we paired certain attributes with all of the Top 250 Brands from Q1 and Q2. The attributes used for each were: quality of service speed, overall speed of service, speed of takeaway, speed at POS, speed in delivery, and speed at table or menu order point. Demographics on speed of service skewed 53 percent female and 47 percent male.

For fast casual, 41.7 percent of these social diners between the ages of 35 and 54 (Gen X-ers) seek improved speed of service standards. The same rings true for 31.8 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds (Millennials) and only 9.2 percent of those ages 55 and up (Baby Boomers). When seeking improved speed of service standards in casual dining, Gen X-ers again take the cake with 62.8 percent voicing their dissatisfaction, versus 19.1 percent of Millennials and 4.3 percent of Boomers. And last but not least, 44.2 percent of Gen X-ers on social seek speed of service improvement at QSRs, along with 26.8 percent of Millennials, and 6.1 percent of Boomers.

There are some interesting observations in this data set. Dominating dissatisfaction are Gen X-ers, which makes sense considering they are the most influential dining group when it comes to current buying power. According to QSR Magazine, the Gen X female demographic makes up roughly half of the U.S. population with a whopping $7 trillion in purchasing power, accounting for 85% of consumer spending.

Some other trends we’re seeing in the dissatisfaction data: Millennials’ highest dissatisfaction percentage comes from fast casuals. This could certainly be related
to the fact that Millennials frequent fast casuals more than any other segment, so they care more about providing feedback about this segment — for better or worse. At 26.8 percent, Millennials are also not shying away from their dissatisfaction toward QSR speed of service expectations, which could very well be because of perceived value. Several sources confirm that Millennials are willing to wait longer and pay more for better quality food if they see the value in it.

**MEASURING DELIVERY TIMES: WHAT’S MOST EFFICIENT?**

Technology has become imperative in measuring food delivery times. Before such products became available, there were few ways restaurant operators could accomplish food delivery research: proprietary research through mystery shoppers, manually tracking delivery times versus ticket times, surveying customers on perceptions of speed, and now, of course, tech-based solutions that automate tracking (Long Range Systems, “Using Data to Transform the Fast-Casual Customer Experience”). If accuracy is what you’re looking for, it seems technology is the only viable solution for tracking delivery speed. By relying on mystery shoppers or consumer surveys, you face subjective opinion. And with manual tracking, there’s too much wasted manpower, time and energy, which completely defeats the purpose.

As stated above, perceived speed is a huge factor in the overall guest experience, but to truly know how your brand is performing, technology is imperative. According
to Long Range Systems, most clients — before implementing an LRS technology — underestimate their actual delivery time by a minute to several minutes.

Upon implementation, these clients allegedly become enlightened to varying speeds of delivery by location, time of day, day of week, and using this information, they are able to better manage to their standards.

ENNACHING THE GUEST EXPERIENCE WITH SERVICE TIME IMPROVEMENT

FCSI Consultant Eric Norman said, “It’s critical to identify the areas in a restaurant operation that play a role in speed of service. Guest perception has to be an integral part of the equation for the brand guest experience.”

There are a handful of areas that impact speed of service in a restaurant. Some of these things include:

- Staffing levels and team coverage of critical areas
- Size of restaurant or dining room
- Guest expectations for service
- Organization
- Training
- Process and/or Technology
- POS
- Number of terminals
TRAINING YOUR STAFF TO BECOME MORE EFFICIENT WITH SPEED

Increasing speed in operations benefits not only the employer, but employees, as well. For fast food and fast casuals, it may be as simple as happier customers. Consider how more pleasant a shift is when you don’t have to deal with long lines and cranky customers because orders are backed up or incorrect. For casual and fine dining, servers benefit from turning tables quickly, leading to more customers and increased sales, which means more tips.

In a QSR magazine article, Saladworks Founder and CEO John Scardapane stresses that restaurant operators should never cut back on front-of-house staff to affect the speed of service, but can do so with the kitchen and hourly back-of-house staff in order to streamline. “One customer that’s unhappy and doesn’t come back costs you a lot more than the hourly rates you’re trying to save by cutting back one [FOH] employee,” he said. Former Boloco CEO John Pepper agrees, and offers up some tips on training employees to increase speed efficiency. “Revisit all of your current training procedures, and reassess your menu and physical plan for ergonomic opportunities,” he said. “We go down to the individual morsels of rice that we use in our burritos and bowls, and analyze the number of footsteps or arm stretches it takes to get food to our guests.”

Aside from properly training staff, operators should be aware that restaurant design has a huge impact on speed of service. “Many operations that I have consulted with made all of their mistakes in the design phase,” Isidore Kharasch, President of Hospitality Works Inc., told QSR magazine. “They did not think through every step an employee has to make to get the food out and they did not think about where a guest stands when waiting to order food, or how many registers they may need if the sales are above expectations.”
MOBILE VS. CALL-AHEAD ORDERING
// DRIVE-THRU VS. WALK-IN

The option to place a food order yourself through mobile ordering is significantly impacting the restaurant landscape, and big brands have started to catch on. There are many advantages to this, including order accuracy, the ability to customize your own order, and to save time. Also, as opposed to calling an order in, mobile ordering has the ability to track data and trends, like customer preferences, which creates loyalty in the long run.

According to RSMI data, 31.5 percent of the 7.8 million social consumers tracked demanded faster service when it came to picking up orders placed ahead through mobile. (Side note: 71.4 percent wanted better design in mobile apps for ordering.) On the other side of the spectrum, 21.4 percent wanted faster service when it came to picking up orders they called in for ahead of time.

A study by the Interactive Advertising Bureau claims that about 69 percent of consumers order food online using a smartphone or tablet. The study also shows that, as of August 2012, nearly a quarter of major pizza chain sales came from online orders (this includes mobile). For Domino’s, online orders make up a whopping 40 percent of its sales. As a test, a Domino’s in La Jolla (San Diego, CA) announced that it will turn off the store’s phone for one day, allowing customers to only order online.

What happens when we expand mobile versus call-ahead ordering to drive-thru and walk-ins? What service model do consumers prefer for best speed of service?
RSMI data shows that a hefty 49.8 percent of consumers prefer using the drive-thru for best speed of service, followed by walk-in counter orders at 32.8 percent. Call-ahead orders come in at 18.1 percent for speed of service preference, and mobile ordering comes in last at 4.2 percent.

HOW LONG ARE GUESTS WILLING TO WAIT?

That’s the question every operator wants to know. 31.2 percent of consumers will pass up drive-thru lanes if the line is too long. This, of course, is subjective to what one would consider “too long.” RSMI data also shows that 28.4 percent of consumers walk out of fast casual restaurants if the line is long, and 67.5 percent of consumers will not wait at a casual or upscale restaurant if the wait is longer than 30 minutes.
TECHNOLOGY: FINDING THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOUR RESTAURANT(S)

There are a few key things to consider when implementing technology into your operations. As stated before, don’t spend money on technology just for technology’s sake. Make sure your tech makes sense for your restaurant concept and enhances the overall experience — that goes for both front-of-house and back-of-house. Secondly, make sure your tech has the ability to gather information about your customers. As the old adage goes, knowledge is power. In this case, knowledge of your customers’ habits, preferences and behaviors allows you to create better experiences for your customers. Again — and we can’t stress this enough — this creates long-term loyalty. In the words of Isidore Kharasch, “The lifeblood of any restaurant is the return customer.”

“In today’s world, you’re only as smart as your data. Affordable and automated technology is available today that helps manage guest flow, seating configurations, service delivery times and inventory, giving restaurateurs the information to make smart reforms.” — “The Restaurant of the Future,” Long Range Systems

Technology that enhances speed of service is widespread if you use it correctly, and comes in the form of tablets, kiosks, mobile apps, POS systems, and other technology that’s specialized to cutting down time, like Long Range Systems (LRS) product Table Tracker.

TABLE TRACKER: “DELIVER FOOD FASTER”

Table Tracker is essentially a table location system. Using advanced RFID communication technology, the system identifies where guests are sitting so that food
can be delivered to them faster. When a guest places an order, the cashier gives the guest a Table Tracker device and a timer is started for that order. On the back-end, staff can see when an order has taken longer than expected, and knows exactly which table the guest is sitting at. The device, which is about the size of a CD case, is most popular in the fast casual segment and has many benefits, including big data tracking. In Foodable WebTV Network’s “Turn & Burn: Speed of Service and Tracking In-Store Customer Satisfaction,” LRS CEO Skip Cass tells Foodable he prefers the term simple data. “Simple data is more powerful than, say, big data because you can’t just sit there and stare at a screen all day long,” he said. Two of the RSMI’s Top 10 Brands for Speed of Service Sentiment (above), uses Table Tracker as a tool to enhance both speed when delivering orders and to enhance overall customer experience, which we will dive into more below.

**MAKING SENSE OF THE DATA**

The Table Tracker device is capable of tracking data and analytics, like how many customers a restaurant has served, how long it takes to make each order, and where customers are choosing to sit. It also allows the multi-unit operator the ability to compare Store A’s delivery times to Store B’s delivery times in order to assess any problems.

Think about what a restaurant operator could do with this information. Knowing how many customers you’ve served in a given time period could help to decipher which days are busiest and when you might need more hands on deck. It gives comparative insight to multi-unit operators of hot spots, and could play into inventory management and food waste reduction if consistent patterns develop. This information may also be interesting to use for daily specials, in order to see what works and what doesn’t. Of course, measuring how long it takes to make each order allows operators to determine
an average benchmark of time expectation. It weeds out inefficient employees and lets employees know which menu items take longer to prepare. And finally, relaying where customers are choosing to sit gives room to analyze trends, like why many people choose to not sit at the two-tops or that your dining room could be redesigned for greater efficiencies or dispersions.

Aside from tracking data that allows operators to take action and solve problems, other Table Tracker benefits, according to the LRS website, include enhanced productivity from employees and faster food delivery. According to LRS whitepaper “Using Data to Transform the Fast-Casual Customer Experience,” data provided by the Table Tracker system gives food runners the ability to reference a prominently displayed computer screen, locate the order and corresponding table, and deliver food quickly. Of course, by bridging that gap of time it would normally take for a food runner to find a guest, food not only gets delivered faster, but allows the food to stay warm and fresh, and guests don’t need to worry about flagging someone down.

CASE STUDIES

JASON’S DELI

Table Tracker research shows that some of the customers adopting this technology have seen as much as one minute or more shaved off their food delivery time. One of these restaurant brands is fast casual chain Jason’s Deli. The case study shows that Jason’s Deli was a brand that relied heavily on plastic table cards to locate guests, and the restaurant found that food runners were taking way too long to identify correct tables, especially during rush hours. Aside from that, food delivery times weren’t being tracked efficiently. Automated table tracking began

We shaved a full minute off ticket times just by having the ability to prioritize orders and deliver food faster.
at a Jason’s Deli test location, and after just a few weeks of using the Table Tracker product, the fast casual brand began reducing food delivery times ("Using Data to Transform the Fast-Casual Customer Experience," Long Range Systems).

“We saw immediate improvement in ticket times,” said Michael Johnson, a Jason’s Deli regional manager. “We shaved a full minute off ticket times just by having the ability to prioritize orders and deliver food faster. Runners find customers more quickly and get back to the next delivery faster just because we use Table Tracker.”

MIA’S

For Mia’s, a fast casual launched by Carrabba’s Italian Grill Founder Johnny Carrabba, Table Tracker also impacted operations positively, but also led to better staff retention. Carrabba said that Mia’s saw faster ticket times because “everyone had visibility of order status.” When runners no longer had to call out to customers, the environment shifted and became less tense, he said, adding, “I know that providing better working conditions will help me keep staff.”

THE POWER OF FEEDBACK

Not surprisingly, Millennials are the most connected generation to-date. In fact, 80 percent of Millennials sleep with their cell phone next to their bed (U.S. Chamber Foundation, “Millennials Report”). And the behavioral habits go deeper in relation to staying connected and in making decisions: More than any other generation, Millennials have an unwavering need to gather opinions from others before taking action. It works both ways — Millennials want to provide feedback to others, as well. Can you believe that nearly a quarter of Millennials seek out the opinion(s) of others on social media
before committing to a purchasing decision? Moreover, “55 percent of Millennials share their negative experiences online” ("The Millennial Mindset: How a Generation is Reshaping Hospitality," Long Range Systems).

To put it into perspective: Now that social media channels have become a definitive source of decision making amongst Millennials, the most influential consumer group for the restaurant business is allowing the experiences of others to determine whether a potential new customer will visit your restaurant or not, before even setting foot in your store. This puts an even greater stress on providing a full, great dining experience to your guests. Again, speed of service directly correlates to this perception, which is directly tied to overall retail sales. Every second counts.

**SPEED OF SERVICE FEEDBACK**

The RSMI data confirms that people love giving feedback on social, but we dig a bit deeper into the how. The data shows that, not only are social consumers willing to give feedback to other consumers, but to the brands themselves. 61.8 percent of the mobile users tracked used social to provide feedback to restaurants on speed of service in the past 90 days. 34.4 percent of mobile users have tweeted during a restaurant visit, providing feedback on speed of service, and within the past 90 days, 12.5 percent of mobile users have taken pictures and posted on social media platforms regarding speed of service issues with restaurants.

**THE POSITIVE: SPEED OF SERVICE SUPPORT**

According to RSMI data, 21.4 percent of positive sentiment on social were about
a high performing staff or manager. 17.2 percent of positive sentiment regarded a brand’s operational systems, and 28.4 percent of positive sentiment came from friendly engagement with staff.

**THE NEGATIVE: SPEED OF SERVICE COMPLAINTS — “CONSUMER BUZZ”**

On the downside, 21.5 percent of complaints that were tracked through the Index were in regards to staff issues at the restaurant. 18.1 percent of complaints came from accuracy issues or mishandled food, and 6.4 percent of complaints came from technology malfunction at point of sale (POS).

**CHECK POINT**

Yelp is a prime example of how negative consumer behavior on social has affected the restaurant & hospitality industry. It’s this observation that inspired Long Range Systems product [Check Point](#), an interactive tablet-based feedback system that consists of a few survey questions to collect customer feedback on-site. LRS CEO Skip Cass says, “The perfect opportunity to capture guest data is before they leave the restaurant. This is an opportunity, while credit cards are being run, to ask and get some simple information.”

Check Point has a completion rate of 75-80 percent, compared to the stale comment cards you sometimes still see in restaurants, which allegedly have a 5 percent completion rate. According to Cass, what differentiates Check Point from other feedback systems is its simplicity, as well as being real-time. If a customer provides feedback of a negative experience, the system sends an automated page to the manager so he/she
can intercept the customer before they leave to handle the situation and rectify any problems. The hope is to eliminate, or at least minimize, negative feedback on social media platforms. This doesn’t necessarily mean guests won’t still vocalize their opinions about a negative experience.

**NEED FOR SPEED: TOP SOURCES OF IMPROVEMENT**

Below are the top sources social consumers say improve speed.

- Staff knowledge
- Wait systems
- Call-ahead ordering
- Menu design or options
- Fast servers
- Dual lane drive-thru

**THE TIME IS NOW YESTERDAY**

Between service timeliness and perceived value, speed of service is an element ingrained in the woodwork of restaurant operations. It affects your restaurant — especially QSRs and fast casuals — whether you address it or not. Technology is the most efficient way to bridge this gap between service and customer satisfaction, but it’s up to you to maximize your opportunities, especially in terms of big data. You may have heard the old adage slow and steady wins the race, but when it comes to restaurants, speed is more important than you think.
Long Range Systems, LLC is a leading global provider of on-site paging, guest management and surveying tools. LRS solutions are used in a variety of settings, including: restaurants, hotels, hospitals, day cares, amusement parks, churches, retirement and nursing homes, doctor/dentists offices and more. LRS owns 20 patents and markets over 30 products designed to streamline operations, improve customer satisfaction levels and increase sales. For more information, visit www.LRSus.com

Foodable WebTV Network, founded by DigitalCoCo; and led by restaurant industry publisher & producer Paul Barron, officially launched in 2013, but has been ramping up its media development for the past three years. Foodable is a new media company that provides rich, broadcast-quality production and strong editorial content for trade professionals and food enthusiasts. Merging technology, social media, rich content, and digital agency services designed to reach chefs and independent and multi-unit operators, Foodable is currently comprised of ten original WebTV shows, a National blog; eleven city-level blogs, and monthly rankings; — pulled from DigitalCoCo’s proprietary Restaurant Social Media Index (RSMI) — of the Top 25 Restaurants in each of our covered food cities. For more information, visit www.foodabletv.com.

Led by the Foodable WebTV Network, Foodable Labs is home to niche industry insights and industry reports guided by raw data pulled from DigitalCoCo’s proprietary Restaurant Social Media Index (RSMI). The RSMI tracks the behavior and sentiment
of more than 69 million U.S. consumers across 17 social media platforms in more than 241,000 locations, and continues to expand.

Interested in getting more reports like this? Contact us at hello@digitalcoco.com.