



Merchandising Innovations in the Drive-Thru Enhance Consumer Experience and Drive Sales

Quick service industry sales reached \$178.8 billion in 2011, with close to 70% of those sales coming through the drive-thru.

The outlook for 2012 indicates growth for QSR, but there will continue to be a battle for share—including from non-traditional competition. Time compressed consumers still desire to frequent drive-thrus –yet their expectations continue to rise. In this ultra-competitive environment, how do QSRs retain customers and drive sales?

By strategically incorporating cost-effective innovations that will drive customer satisfaction.

According to a King-Casey Report, customers are unhappy with the speed and quality of service as well as with overcomplicated menu boards.¹ The QSR industry annually produces a myriad of studies that reinforce these same customer attitudes. In order to address these demands, operators are turning to merchandising innovation that allows them to leverage merchandising control and increase sales.

¹King-Casey Report Insights and Trends in Retail Branding, Merchandising and Design

Meeting the Need for Speed

First and foremost, customers visit the drive-thru to save time. A key to meeting and exceeding this expectation is to blend personal interaction with technology.

A study prepared for QSR Magazine concluded that price confirmation and order verification stand as the most important improvements restaurants can make with customers to speed up and ensure the accuracy of the drive-thru purchase. Menu boards that incorporate both are in high demand.

Menu boards that are less cluttered and more focused on a specific day-part also speed up the experience by making it easier for customers to identify their options, make their selections and place their orders. By featuring mouthwatering photos of menu items on the board, operators can maximize their opportunities to drive awareness and sales of special promotions, higher margin items, and impulse/add-on items. Pictures are proven to sell more product than words, but an operator still needs to be guided by the principles of simplicity so that the customer's



experience is easy, and the outcome is a higher check! If there are too many messages—and they are not placed according to the customer’s decision process, the result will be a confused, stressed customer. An axiom in the retail merchandising industry is that when the customer is confused or stressed they begin to ‘trade out’ and ‘trade down’, and the result for QSR operators is a lower check average at the drive-thru.

Understanding the Drive-Thru Lane Merchandising Zones

Your customer’s experience through the drive-thru is like a journey, with decision points that match up to the physical movement through your drive-thru. Understanding these decision points and communicating messaging that supports these decisions will make it easy for your customer and will maximize your messaging impact. These decision points are called ‘zones’. Ensuring that your merchandising message provides your customer the needed information within each zone is the key to improving their experience and maximizing your sales.

THE ENTRY ZONE prepares the customer for your drive-thru experience with information of what they should expect during the order and delivery process. Signage should lead the customer into the drive-thru and set expectations.

THE PRE-SELL ZONE is where adding product specific signage that highlights new or promotional items really pays off. Many customers know what they want to order before they even see the menu board and most order the same items each time. In the pre-sell zone, the customer is not under pressure to order and is waiting in line, so with the right day-part specific signage featuring targeted, high margin items, there is a great opportunity to influence choices. Ignoring the opportunities that the pre-sell zone can provide you will impact your per check totals. Unfortunately, about half of QSR operators do not utilize messaging in this zone.

THE ORDER ZONE/PURCHASE ZONE – this is the critical zone where the rubber meets the road. It’s the zone that can make or break customer loyalty; the zone that requires absolute accuracy and great customer service. This zone contains the main menu board which should be day-part specific and as uncluttered as possible to avoid overwhelming the customer. This is a critical zone in the drive thru that requires personal interaction between customer and restaurant personnel and the staff here must be top notch.

THE IMPULSE ZONE is the last chance to impact your average check. This zone offers the opportunity to leverage the power of impulse purchases. Located



right in the order zone, this is where up-selling, day-parting and suggestive selling take on important significance. A recent study indicated that effective merchandising in the impulse zone can increase impulse purchases by 40%. Small promotional boards, merchandising at the customer order display, and menu-board toppers capitalize on the power of impulse by offering the customer new, higher-margin, limited time offers or add-ons for their order.

The final zone is the **POST-SALE ZONE** where operators should thank the customer and encourage a repeat visit by featuring other unique menu items, new day-parts, catering, or upcoming sales.

“When it comes to getting the most from your drive-thru zones, a disciplined approach makes a big difference,” says Judy Haselberger, president of Keyser Retail Solutions. “A Zone Strategy and Line of Sight Analysis will quickly identify high-value opportunities to optimize drive-thru merchandising, allowing a store operator to day-part effectively and deliver the right message at the right time in the right place to influence customers’ decisions.”

Increasing Merchandising Control to Drive Sales

Managing these messages has the potential of being a daunting and error prone task. The pressures of merchandising communications have never been higher: extension into new day-parts, expanded menu offerings, menu labeling challenges, and a value and time conscious customer all come together in your drive-thru. Without a disciplined strategy and execution plan, merchandising at the drive-thru can have a negative or sub-optimized effect on your customer’s experience and your sales.

Maximizing your messaging—and growing your business—requires a synergistic approach: marrying your brand strategy, your menu strategy and your business goals into compelling communications for your customer. Ensuring these communications occur at the right time in your customer’s decision process—or journey—through your drive-thru will make it easier for your customer and will result in increased sales.

A Final Note

Success in meeting the needs of today’s consumers runs deeper than excellent food and great service. With the continued dominance of drive-thru sales, merchandising will play an increasingly important role in the overall consumer



experience as speed and accuracy continues to factor into the overall satisfaction equation. Operators who most successfully and cost-effectively manage their merchandising will retain share, drive sales and attract consumers from competitors who lag behind.

To learn more, contact Keyser Retail Solutions at 866-917-0400 or salesupportKV@keyser-group.com.

About Keyser Retail Solutions

Keyser Retail Solutions has been a leader in QSR signage and drive-thru innovation for 45 years. With a business model that grew up with drive-thru, Keyser has been the force behind many of the design and engineering developments now commonplace in drive-thru systems around the world. With innovations like the Triple Day-part Fully Automated Drive-Thru Menu Board, Pre-Sell and Impulse Zone Series, Keyser Retail Solutions helps QSRs compete with smart analyses and affordable merchandising tools that drive sales and profits.

