

Case Study

Blind Squirrel

Never Losing Sight of
the Guest Experience



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RESTAURANT PROFILE

Restaurant Type:
Casual Dining

Number of Units:
1 site
Louisville, KY

Year Established:
2017

THE CHALLENGE

Routing diners across the restaurant to various locations, without compromising the guest experience, seating real-estate or staff efficiency.

“If you want to know what we’re all about at the Blind Squirrel, just read the sign,” says general manager, Rob Young. He motions to a mural behind him with a smile. It features a green, sunglass-clad squirrel and three prescient words arched above: Music, Sports, Grub. “Those three things are the basis of what we do. So, whichever one brings you in here; we want to make sure you get the most out of it that you can.”

With two outdoor volleyball courts (one entirely covered!), a patio and even a separate stage for acoustic music, routing guests in and outside, while optimizing seating space, is the restaurant’s biggest challenge. With an operation like this, you can’t just eyeball everything in one fell swoop, so being mindful of all the seating areas, while staying in the moment for customers, isn’t just important; it’s critical.

Young knows the value of guest management technology over pen and paper, especially when it comes to high volume. When the restaurant opened in 2017, he’d used the Yelp Nowait software to handle his front-of-house.

“I’d call it fine, but Yelp Nowait just did the basics. It couldn’t do everything we wanted,” he says. “You can tell the software that was created for another purpose and adapted to work in a restaurant, versus what’s been exclusively designed to work in a restaurant.” Those instincts are what eventually led him to ConnectSmart Host. The Blind Squirrel needed something robust, yet intuitive; something Young could train his staff on quickly. One difference-maker was the customized ConnectSmart Host table maps.

“It might sound like a minor thing,” he says, “but having my restaurant mapped out on the tablet, with my actual plants and decor. It looks like my restaurant, and not just colored blocks like a lot of those other systems use. It helps us immeasurably.”

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- Rob Young , General Manager

With such variety in floor space and seating options, the ease of being able to take a reading of his tables at a glance, and not have to stop and decode the layout becomes a time saver during those traffic rushes.

The other factor in choosing a guest management platform like ConnectSmart Host is the staff itself. The Blind Squirrel employs a mix of restaurant veterans and newcomers, with many hosts pursuing degrees at the local colleges alongside their restaurant duties. Seasonality becomes a factor, and the security of knowing that no matter who he’s got up front, and with what experience, they won’t find themselves stumbling or lost through the software. It removes one less worry from a feverish restaurant shift.

What kicks in for them in the clutch, are ConnectSmart Host features like seating rotations. Young’s staff can configure them to their specific metrics, something the Nowait platform couldn’t offer. Not every restaurant works the same way. These features allow them to adjust to situations as they arise, and set personal goals for their service. That reconfigurability, along with ConnectSmart Host’s strong data capabilities, allows for reporting and analytics. Operators can use these data points, like average wait times or seating efficiency, to identify snags in their service workflow. From there, they can make tweaks for improvement.

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On a busy day, those seating rotations remove the guesswork from their processes, especially during more active seasons. The staff knows who's seated where, and how long they've been there. "You don't realize how much you depend on those kinds of features until they're gone." It's incremental things, like a rushed staff and failing technology, that chip away at a restaurant staff's ability to give guests a premier dining experience.

Features like 2-way SMS texting help them go above and beyond, as Young notes that freedom of being able to reach out directly to guests when a situation changes (like if a party doesn't show up) or a potential new seating arrangement becomes available.

With so many different seating options in the restaurant, some of them outside, a stable platform that can work on their WiFi without risk of going down is what keeps them cruising when chaos rears up. Reliable technology helps put an anxious restaurant manager's mind at ease: when a snafu happens, they can address it quickly and without fear of a technological flub slowing them down any further.

Restaurants are always subject to variables, with some more affected than others. From day to day, even hour to hour, the Blind Squirrel's operation must adapt to a changing environment. Besides the weather, which swings a big hinge for them, they regularly see big shifts in their hourly demographic. "The crowd that comes here for lunch on a weekday isn't the same bunch who roll through to play summer volleyball, or to catch some live music," says Rob. "We've got to adapt quickly."



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- Rob Young, General Manager



Powerful technology needn't be overwhelming and shouldn't demand too much of the user's attention. Ultimately, when it's at its best, you should be able to have it running in the background, barely even noticing that it's there. For The Blind Squirrel, this kind of tech has proven immeasurable to their success. They can weather any storm, figurative and literal, knowing that no matter what, they can keep their guest flow running optimally.

"I'm serious. Bring anyone on the fence over to me, and I'll show them what they're missing by not using ConnectSmart Host. It's changed our whole operation," Rob says with a laugh.

As the restaurant prepares for a whole host of events, from concerts to tailgate parties, the painted squirrel behind him becomes less of a company logo and more of a metaphor for the business: the future is indeed bright. Bright enough for shades.

Want to learn more about their ConnectSmart restaurant solution from QSR Automations? Contact us at 855-980-7328, ext 1 or email us at Sales@QSRAutomations.com.



ABOUT QSR AUTOMATIONS:

QSR Automations, headquartered in Louisville, KY with offices in the United Kingdom, is a global industry leader in kitchen automation and guest management services. Since 1996, restaurant operators have turned to the brand's signature platform, ConnectSmart, for customized solutions to improve the guest experience and drive operational excellence. Used in 21 of the nation's top 25 casual dining chains, ConnectSmart leverages data to develop customized solutions that create calmer kitchens, simpler workflows and happier guests. We didn't just pioneer restaurant technology, we perfected it.