Walk-On's Bistreaux & Bar

How ConnectSmart® Kitchen Became a Game Changer

QSR® automations

RESTAURANT PROFILE

Restaurant Type:
Casual Dining

Number of Units:
120 + sites, in 5 states.

Year Established
2003

THE CHALLENGE

To replace paper tickets while streamlining operations and consistency in the kitchen.

In 2012, ESPN named Walk-On's Bistreaux and Bar the Number one Sports Bar in America. Now, That's a title! Established in Louisiana back in 2003 by LSU Basketball alum Brandon Landry and Jack Warner, Walk-On's committed to delivering locally influenced cuisine and memorable game day dining experiences from the opening whistle. Fusing a time-tested "sports and socializing" aesthetic with strong team dynamics, the business has since spread to 120+ sites throughout Louisiana, Alabama, Texas, Mississippi and Tennessee. The winning streak shows no signs of stopping either – but to understand their steady tear towards American Sports Supremacy (and to let up on these sports metaphors a bit) we can chart the Walk-On's story in a bit more detail.

TICKETS vs AUTOMATION

Walk-On's began humbly enough. It was the tangibly realized dream of two LSU Tiger alum with a shared love for sports and working relationship polished on the court. They ran the restaurant on paper tickets, broadcasting games and making good on juggling the three points of customer satisfaction, business acumen and top notch cuisine. Once the ball got rolling and word got out though, the business needed new strategies to reach their fullest potential. "We were simply looking to improve operations and the consistency of our kitchen," says Keegan Lanier, Director of Operations. "Also, we really wanted to get away from paper tickets."

The critical moment came when seasoned chef and Vice President of Culinary Mike Turner came on board. "When I came to Walk-On's, which was my 4th restaurant, we were using paper tickets. We were running 25 minute checks, the food quality was garbage. We had dead food wilting under hot plates, no balancing, and the hardest working man in the kitchen was the chef. He'd be trying to garnish all the checks and the items, gather all the checks and sell the food." Both Lanier and Turner knew that automation would be the key, but weren't interested in any system

that would take months and months to implement. Furthermore, ease-of-use and the ability to customize was their foremost concern. They'd looked at Aloha kitchen, but felt they needed a back-of-house (BOH) system that reported on more granular, real-time kitchen data and margins they could customize. Aloha couldn't deliver. Fortunately, Turner could pull from his experience at the Cheesecake Factory, where he first encountered the Kitchen Display System (KDS) ConnectSmart Kitchen. "Cheesecake factory is a high volume restaurant. I'm talking $10 to $30 million per unit, 250 menu items, 800 prep items, all fully operational. It's a beast! I've done $100,000 days at cheesecake factory, $9,000 hours, and never had a check go longer than 12-15 minutes using ConnectSmart Kitchen."

Ultimately, he acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of restaurant management with kitchen technology and automation. He compares most restaurant processes to running "10,000 gallons of water through a garden hose," noting the absolute necessity of a system that can take all those disparate streams of data, rendering them digestible to whoever is working in the kitchen.

> **"** When I came on to Walk-On's, my 4th restaurant, they were still using paper tickets," says Turner. "And the hardest working man in the kitchen was the chef, trying to garnish all the checks and the items, gather it all up, prep and sell the food. **"**
>
> **- Mike Turner,** *Vice President of Culinary*

12%
INCREASE

IN PEAK-HOUR SALES

17%
INCREASE

IN COVERS

32
HOURS SAVED

PER WEEK

THE REMEDY (A New Playbook)

Sometimes, all it takes to make a good team a great team is a few revisions to the playbook. Both Lanier and Turner knew they wanted a robust KDS that could help streamline their workflow and turnover higher guest counts, but wanted to be sure that no matter what they implemented, their team could get on board with minimal fuss. "More importantly, I'm a data guy," says Turner. "I like being able to look at my KDS to determine optimal cook times, chokepoints and potential hazards towards ticket times." Being able to do this "on the fly" is of even higher premium for Turner, who is often visiting different sites in and out of his office. "With CSK, it's really easy for me to see which stations have been impacted based on the data I can get right on the CSK dashboard."

Overall, the implementation process was buttery smooth. They began the process at their test Walk-On's store in Baton Rouge to get the team on board. Once they felt comfortable working with the system, they worked in groups to roll CSK out to their sites 5 at a time, going live in all their stores by the end of 2015. Since then, they've opened 7 more, all running on CSK.

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THE RESULTS (Stats)

Still, a powerful KDS promising big wins in a short turnaround is one thing. Creating actionable results though? "We're saving a ton on paper alone," says Lanier who cites the "nickel and dime" expense of keeping those ticket registers stocked. He also notes the permanence of the durable hardware, knowing he won't need to constantly replace it or update it, as a built in ROI that keeps on rolling.

Turner, true to his "data guy" moniker, offers some concrete stats. "When I first started, we were running 18-25 minute average ticket times." Since implementing CSK, they've managed to shave off 6-7 minutes, scaling back to a 12-14 minute ticket times. "I'd say a 50% increase in terms of food quality." Both attribute it to the improved labor and efficiency of the KDS, segmenting tasks and spotlighting choke points in the workflow. Furthermore, because of CSK's "spy window" functionality, managers get real-time results on their working stations and can jump in to help when circumstances dictate.

Besides productivity gains via reallocated hours and streamlined ticket times, the system allows Walk-On's to seat more guests (Lanier estimates by 5%), marking an increase in profit. Given the gains they've made from the outset, it's a trend they forecast to only continue.

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" I'd hate to see where we would be without ConnectSmart Kitchen. Life would be drastically different! "

- Keegan Lanier, Director of Operations

MOVING FORWARD (Next Season)

The internal success of the CSK implementation quickly led Turner and Lanier to seek further automated solutions. As it stands, Walk-On's will be utilizing the FOH client, DineTime, to create a more connected restaurant all around. "We love CSK, and we want to have everything integrated into one system," says Turner. Having a fully integrated front and back-of-house situation will only help to streamline things further, pushing guest counts and profits higher, and turnaround times lower.

"There is just no way we could've sold 120 restaurants if we were still doing paper checks," says Turner. "We'd maybe have 6-8 restaurants, running around trying to figure out what to do to get our food quality better." For Lanier, the CSK difference is palpable in the very air of the kitchen, noting a calmness and control that wasn't present before. "I'd hate to see where we would be without CSK," he adds. "Life would be drastically different!"

Want to learn more about QSR Automations ConnectSmart restaurant solutions?
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.

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