

Sales Drive

These proven and newly emerging tactics increase drive-thru sales.

It may seem like simply having a drive thru is a slam dunk for sales, but there's always room for improvement. With such a large percentage of most quick serves' revenue coming from the drive thru, any tips and tricks that influence purchasing decisions can push profits even higher.

It's not only about increased sales, however—a few small improvements can lead to a better customer experience, too. The drive thru is an extension of a brand; similar in ways to the indoor experience, but with its own vibe. Magan O'Dell, vice president of business development at **Uni-Structures**, suggests consulting with manufacturing companies that have an in-house design team in order to implement marketing, design, and branding that expands the indoor atmosphere to the drive thru. “This often includes color, vinyl logos, wood textures, LED lights, and promo boards that use pixel-rich digital images,” she says.

Common sense says that the faster the service, the shorter the line. Dual lanes can help keep lines short in drive thrus. “This setup enables you to take double the amount of orders during a peak hour, essentially doubling your overall capacity,” says André Pravaz, CEO of **Summit Innovations**. “Dual-lane order points come with a caveat though—your staff must be quick at preparing the meals and expediting the orders swiftly through the pick-up point.”

Once a car enters the drive thru, restaurants can immediately help speed guests' decision-making process using digital signage. “Pre-sell boards can be used before the ordering section to highlight promos and limited time offerings before the guest begins ordering,” says



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Ryan Hildebrand, product manager for **SICOM**. When customers spot a LTO or special deal on the pre-sell board, they often will make an instant decision to purchase that item, saving time at the menuboard.

The menuboard itself should provide a clear message to customers, promote new

menu items and deals, and place information in front of the customer in an easy-to-read and appealing manner. Similar items, such as combos, beverages, and dollar menu items, should be grouped together in one area. “When the customer is well informed on the menu options, they’ll make a menu selection faster,” says Scott

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Marentay, global director of outdoor service innovation for **Acrelec**. “LTO still rules the day.”

Richard Ventura, vice president of strategy, DSCE for **NEC Display Solutions of America**, advises formulating a strong drive-thru content strategy to increase sales. “Dayparting, offering LTOs, and having a call to action will help engage the right audience throughout the day,” he says.

Along with visual order confirmation at the outdoor unit, the ability of the culinary team to listen to the customer through headsets and listen-in-only systems boosts customer satisfaction in other ways. For example, a receipt may say “heavy pickle,” but the kitchen would hear “put pickles on the top, in the middle, and under the patties,” which is exactly what will satisfy the customer, but cannot be

tems in hand, face-to-face upselling, and doling out smiles and thank yous under a bright blue sky. “Quick serves have realized that customers appreciate face-to-face interaction in the drive-thru lane,” says Paul Foley, president of HME hospitality and specialty communications at **HM Electronics**. “When there’s a person out on the lane taking orders, it gives it a personalized touch to the customer experience. And when there’s a long line in the drive thru, customers know they won’t have to wait to reach the speaker post to place their order,” he says. This changes the customer’s perspective on their wait time because they know their order is being placed sooner.

As demand for speed and convenience increases on the consumer side, restaurants are responding in innovative ways. Increasingly, concepts are being built with no dining room at all. “We are seeing more restaurants built with a drive-thru and walk-up-only design,” says Anna Ellis, sales and marketing manager at **Ready Access**. Frozen custard concepts, coffee shops, and burger joints are jumping on this trend.

Restaurants are also adapting to mobile ordering options. As more brands invest in mobile, guests will be given the option to use the restaurant’s app, then pick up their orders at the drive thru or at designated parking spots. “Mobile apps may also provide promotional discounts through mobile notifications when you’re near a restaurant to entice you to stop in,” Foley says.

Many of the innovations we see in the modern drive thru—packaged value meals, simplified ordering, auto-greeters, clear menuboard design, friendly service—are common aspects that we have seen peak and flatten, so it is reassuring to see so many quick serves “reinventing the wheel” using technology. But don’t get too comfortable yet—the next wave of improvements is waiting in the wings. “The next incremental increases will be found through the integration of data and technology to create an entirely new customer experience that increases loyalty and spend,” says Sumter Cox, senior director of marketing and communications for **Mood Media**.



R.F. Technologies, Inc.



Ordermatic

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Order confirmation units—which display a guest’s order on a digital screen—are one of the best ways to improve speed of service and accuracy. “Quick serves can save time suggestive selling by using graphics on the order confirmation unit and confirming order accuracy with the unit as well,” says Bob Noorian, CEO and founder of **R.F. Technologies, Inc.** This helps avoid bottlenecks caused by incorrect orders or additions. “The order confirmation unit, therefore, helps with speed of service, incremental sales, and overall order accuracy,” Noorian says.

quickly noted on a receipt in that detail. Attention to these small details builds brand loyalty. “The customer will return to the restaurant that has the technology to get it right every time,” Noorian says. A high-quality audio system with clear, crisp sound is always a sound investment in the drive thru.

In the old days, customers wouldn’t encounter the human element of the drive thru until the end of the experience. Now, it’s not unusual to see employees outside in the drive-thru lanes—greeting customers with tablet-style POS sys-