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CUSTOM SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

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Landmark Local Restaurant Uses Automation to Enable Unique Customer Experiences

Top-Rated Raleigh Steakhouse sought to update their processes to enable high-touch customer interactions while maximizing the utilization of dining space. Long term partnership with Digital Mettle created progressive improvements over the course of fifteen years.

GOALS

- Predict and respond to dynamic demand

- Delight customers online and in person with tailored messages and experiences

- Update method of staff management and scheduling

APPROACH

- Supplement off the shelf software to better fit the unique business culture

- Create intranet to share operational insights to all staff

- Customize eCommerce website with integrations to internal hostess CRM systems

TECHNOLOGY

- Windows PCs and Servers

- Desktop application written in C# .NET

- Able Commerce based website

RESULTS

- Just-in-time dining room and kitchen allocation to meet demand

- Efficient use of available staff

- Increased customer satisfaction

- Smoother process for booking and executing special events

Challenges

The customer's selected systems for reservations and hostess functions did not scale sufficiently to meet their needs, and the vendor suddenly stopped providing enhancements. As closed systems with no API, options for extending features were limited.

Customer did not have a CRM system, but wanted to provide very high-touch interactions such as greeting guests and wishing them "happy anniversary" when appropriate. Those interactions needed to extend to the website, which also used a platform without the capabilities built-in.

Reservation system could not provide for the ability to re-arrange and open new dining rooms based on demand

About the Customer

This family owned restaurant was established in the early 1960s. It is more than 40,000 square feet broken up into eight dining rooms and serves a half million meals a year

The restaurant has an established side business selling gift items in an on-site store that they have extended online

They host regular special occasions like weddings as well as their own events such as cooking classes and charity events.

The Customer's Vision

The restaurant's eight dining rooms are each equipped with modular tables. This allows them to convert to accommodate primarily two-person parties for Valentine's Day and big parties for Thanksgiving. Additionally, dining rooms can be closed to save on staffing when not needed

Predicting the size and type of crowd expected for dinner is critical for maximizing efficiency and minimizing diner's wait times.

Having built their reputation on good customer service, the restaurant was eager to leverage their internet presence as diners started interacting with them online.

Knowing that a repeat customer was coming back on a special occasion allows the restaurant to create great surprises for their most loyal customers.

Embrace and Extend

Before meeting Digital Mettle, the restaurant had invested in an off-the-shelf locally hosted reservation and hostess system. While meeting their basic needs, these systems fell short in several important ways.

- No ability to account for dynamic seat arrangements
- No ability to predict crowd size per hour
- No integration with eCommerce or CRM
- No retrospective reports
- No staff scheduling
- No recording of factors which influence crowd size, such as weather or holidays
- No special event management
- No reservation wait lists
- No gift card system
- No routing of hostess seating ticket printing

Throughout the partnership engagement, Digital Mettle was able to address each of these gaps.

Turn Around Time

The key piece of domain knowledge that the restaurant wanted to apply was how long parties of a particular size would occupy a table on a given night, taking into account various factors such a weather, holiday, day of week, time, etc. Using these inputs and the reservations already booked, they desired to reconfigure the restaurant dining rooms nightly to best suit the crowd size hour-by-hour.

Digital Mettle developed a new desktop application and database called Seat Counter which allows the restaurant staff to perform this analysis. This system merges data analytics with human heuristic insights to produce accurate breakdowns.

Constantly Evolving

By taking the approach that tools for superior customer service are never "done", Digital Mettle's customer has made ongoing investment in their ideas which have paid back in efficiency, customer loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing.