

Technology Profile: Colorado State University

Years of Technology Experience



At Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Residential Dining Services is using a menu-management system to its full financial potential.

“We use it to manage our food procurement, menus, forecasting, recipes and nutritional information,” said Deon Lategan, director of Residential Dining Services. “We have nine locations on campus and it is a pretty daunting task to order food for those nine locations.”

When Lategan first arrived at Colorado State four years ago, Residential Dining Services used a DOS-based system that he describes as “merely an ordering guide.”

From his previous experience at other universities, Lategan knew that this antiquated system was not the best way to handle foodservice management. “I made the commitment that we were going to implement the Windows system, and it’s been a long process,” he said. He chose Hospitality Suites FOM Select-menu management software from Computrition. “We hired a Computrition administrator and she has managed the system for us, and we have more than 3,000 recipes. We purchase more than 4,000 products for those recipes. We had to implement all of that stuff.”

He said that the software has greatly increased productivity, revenues increased \$732,000 (nearly 4 percent) and food costs decreased \$140,000. “Now what happens is the managers forecast the number of customers expected at any given meal, and then the system helps us determine what the product mix is going to be for each of those meals. The system generates an order for us based on what the manager has forecast, and the order is based on current inventories. Then we

submit that order electronically to our vendor and the product shows up when we need it.”

The managers are able to make their forecasts because the system tracks consumption history. “It helps us look at history and see how many people ate roast beef or chicken last time,” said Lategan. “At the end of the meal, the cooks will record the amount consumed of those items, and then we enter that back into the system. So whether you are serving a thousand people or 500 people, the system will adjust the numbers for the amount of people you expect. Obviously, people are creatures of habit, so our counts are pretty consistent, and they are affected by things like weather, athletic events, time of year. We try to take those things into account too when we forecast — whether it’s a home football game or an away football game.”

When the system calculates how many people are expected to have each item, it will calculate that to an exact number and adjust the recipes accordingly. This has led to a decrease in food waste. “The way it was done four years ago here is the recipes were based at each of the kitchens,” he said. “The cooks either had recipe cards or they had spiral notebooks. Those recipes would be batched for 50, 100 or whatever, and then you would take out your calculator and you would extend those recipes out. Then you would cook to the closest 50. Whereas now, when we forecast 287 portions of chicken and noodle soup, it will print a recipe for that exact amount. At the end of the day, we just throw the recipe away.”

Lategan said that he also changed the way the system was managed by his staff. “Historically, what was done was the systems were managed locally with global oversight; each unit would forecast and they would be responsible for entering their service records into the system. What I wanted to do, I didn’t want to tie supervisors and managers up doing data-entry work.”

The school hired three data-entry specialists who go from unit to unit and enter the service-record data and order into the system for them. “By our centralizing that effort, we do a better job at it and it doesn’t take the managers off the floor and out of the kitchens,” he said. “I want managers to manage and the data-entry folks to enter the data for us.”

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