

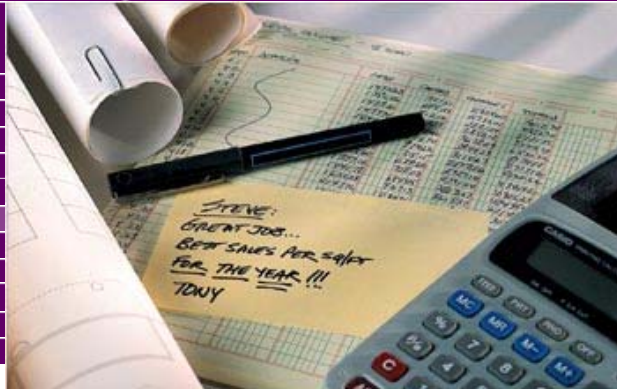
# Pizza Today

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[Home](#) | [Pizza Expo](#) | [Pizza Insight](#) | [NAPO](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [The Hot Slice](#) | [Links](#)

## Departments

- Features
- Front of the House
- Behind the Bar
- The Make Line
- Pizza Production
- Back Office
- Classifieds
- Bulletin Boards
- Archives
- Subscribe
- Contact Us



## Back Office

### High-Tech Delivery



Daniel P. Smith

*Today's technology brings new marketing opportunities.*

Over the last 15 years, Ron Santibanez has witnessed the evolution of the restaurant industry, watching trends come and go, issues rise and fall. But today, Santibanez, president of California-based Qualified Solutions Consulting, sees the industry turning a corner, one already navigated by much of society. And he urges operators to get going.

"Let's face it," says Santibanez, "we're moving to a high-tech world and the restaurant industry cannot turn its back on this."

According to top restaurant consultants, anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of an operator's marketing budget should go into digital marketing with a professional, interactive, and current Web site standing as the central component. Thereafter, opportunities abound with social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, as well as the evolution of other marketing media such as text



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- Misc. Equipment/Smallwares
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- Ovens
- Pizza Toppings
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- Safes/Security Systems
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messaging and online ordering. Operators catching the tech wave report a wild ride of profits.

"I can trace a direct line from the customers in our store to our MySpace and Facebook pages," says Rob Detrick of Linn's Pizza Bar and Grill in Frostburg, Maryland. "Technology's a powerful thing in this business if you utilize it the right way and keep up with it."

Best yet, many of today's tech-inspired marketing efforts carry price tags well below traditional advertising methods such as direct mail and newspaper spots while simultaneously reaching different demographics by way of commonly-accepted methods recognizable to customers.

"People are expecting restaurants to utilize high-tech communication tools and restaurants are wise to acknowledge this," Santibanez says. "Operators can not only differentiate themselves from the competition and go beyond the norm, but simplify the process for the consumer. Make it simpler for the consumer and that's a plus."

As operators graduate from Marketing 101, in which a functional, clean Web site is created, they can then investigate these other tech-based avenues to reaching customers:

Amongst the newest -- and most personal -- touches are social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. With 11 pizza joints within a mile of his door, Detrick understands the need for creative marketing efforts. In 2005, Detrick opened a MySpace page in his college town with near-immediate success. In 2007, he turned to Facebook, his attempt to evolve alongside that site's surging momentum.

"At this point, I can't see us doing it any other way. On a slow night, I can get a message out that is directed, surgical and focused," says Detrick.

At Savastano's in Tulsa, Oklahoma, customers journey from upwards of 40 miles away to get the Chicago-style pizza, travels in part credited to the pizzeria's MySpace page.

"We were able to connect with people throughout the region who were seeking a Chicago feel and that certainly boosted business," says Jennifer Savastano, who created the MySpace page during the Chicago Bears' 2006 playoff run.

The key benefits to such social networking sites: they are free, easy to use, and can inspire swift action. While MySpace boasts a vibrant, interactive feel and more registered users, Facebook offers a clean, uncluttered look popular among college students and young professionals.

Large and small chains alike - and even independents - are embracing online ordering. Without much fanfare, Papa John's launched its online ordering just as the commercial Internet was taking hold in 2001. In recent years, however, the Louisville-based company has expanded its online ordering efforts given the overwhelming response of consumers.

"In the beginning we left it more to our internal resources," explains Bob Ford, director of online marketing for Papa John's. "The new focus has been going out to other online marketing channels, particularly given the effectiveness and positive experience our customers report."

Customers set up an online ordering account and upon login have instant access to the full menu at their local Papa John's. A few clicks later and dinner is on the way.

"Customers seek choice and convenience and online ordering gives them what they're asking for," Ford says.

With many operators already riding the e-mail bandwagon, others have added the latest ride to their collection - text alerts. Mark Gold, co-owner of Milwaukee's ever-popular Pizza Shuttle, noticed his large college-aged clientele consistently checking their cell phones and explored the idea of sending text messages.

"With our demographic," says Gold of his college-heavy populace, "we need to be on the cutting edge and text messaging is it right now."

Gold met with David Wachs of Chicago-based Cellit Mobile Marketing and was drawn to text messaging's affordable price as well as its unique promises, including the ability to track the effectiveness of ads, cultivate relationships with customers, collect data, and multiply the value of advertisements.

"People aren't always in front of their computer, but they almost always have their phone around," says Wachs. "Text messaging is a great way for a pizzeria to augment its other marketing efforts, especially since it complements traditional marketing means."

In the first week, more than 400 patrons joined Pizza Shuttle's "Text Msg Club" to receive four exclusive offers each month. While the immediacy of text messaging is indeed promising, operators must understand and respect that customers might get charged to read the message.

Daniel P. Smith is a freelance writer who covers food and drink for a variety of publications. He resides in Woodridge, Illinois. If you have questions or comments, contact Jeremy White.

[◀ Previous Page](#)

[Back to Top ▲](#)