

TECH AND TEAMWORK

Maintaining Sales Amid Staffing Challenges

By Stephanie Davis

Running a thriving family entertainment center is all about balancing exceptional guest experiences with the demands of the business. For many operators, staffing is a top concern, and technology is increasingly seen as a solution to ease the staffing crunch.

This month, we sat down with Brad VanBuskirk, COO of Stars and Strikes Family Entertainment Centers, and Caleb Wisterman, Stars and Strikes' director of food and beverage, to learn how they've maintained strong sales in their food and beverage department even when staffing is less than best.

With 17 locations across the Southeast, Stars and Strikes has tackled staffing issues using Brunswick's Sync system. Initially, Sync was used solely as the chain's bowling POS system, but when Brunswick expanded its capabilities to include food and beverage, Stars and Strikes eagerly adopted the new features.

"Sync streamlined our operations by integrating everything except the arcade into one system," Brad explained. "Remote printing to the kitchen was a game-changer, simplifying processes and reducing errors." Caleb added, "Good waitstaff and bartenders are hard to find, so we had to think creatively about maintaining service quality even when short-staffed."

The results have been impressive. "Year to date, 43% of our food and beverage sales have come from self-service orders. In some locations with severe staffing issues, that number is as high as 80%," Brad shared. "Technology has given us the flexibility to maintain sales and keep guests happy, even when staffing is less than optimal."

Adapting to Challenges with Technology

"Our goal was to enhance, not replace, our team with technology," Caleb said. "We introduced lane-side ordering via tablets and installed kiosks at all locations. We wanted to ensure a positive guest experience, even when short-staffed." Brad emphasized the importance of these innovations, saying, "There were times when we operated with fewer staff than we would've liked, and these tools were a lifeline. They kept things running smoothly and ensured guests could get what they needed quickly."

Maintaining a Personal Touch

Despite the effectiveness of their tech solutions, both Brad and Caleb understand the importance of a human touch. "Technology can't replace the warmth of personal interaction," Brad noted. "Kiosks and tablets assist, but they shouldn't replace the engagement our guests expect."

Caleb agreed, emphasizing balance. "We train our team to help guests use the technology, but we also stress being present and attentive. Some guests prefer self-ordering, and that's fine, but others still want that personal touch. It's about meeting guests where they are."

Stars and Strikes has taken steps to ensure that guests feel comfortable with the new systems. They've introduced

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printed materials to guide guests through their options, branding it as "Order Your Way," which allows guests to choose how they want to order—through a tablet, kiosk, or with a server.

Benefits Beyond Staffing

The benefits of technology extend beyond staffing. Stars and Strikes uses Sync for event booking and online reservations. "We can pull up reservations, prepare for events, and schedule staff shifts accordingly," Caleb explained. "We've also seen a reduction in order errors, which has helped with our cost of goods. The orders are captured precisely as the guests want, reducing waste and increasing satisfaction."

Brad highlighted another significant benefit: "With so many guests self-ordering, we've ensured that all orders are accurately recorded and paid for. This precision helps us monitor inventory and sales more effectively." From an operational standpoint, the integrated system has made a big difference. "We can easily pull reports, track sales in real time, and ensure we're prepared for busy periods. It's made our operation smoother and more efficient," Brad noted.

Advice for Other Operators

Brad and Caleb offer advice for other family entertainment centers facing similar challenges. "Look closely at your operation and see where technology can complement your team," Caleb suggested. "Setting it up requires effort, but the payoff in smoother operations and guest satisfaction is worth it."

For operators looking to enhance efficiency and guest satisfaction, Stars and Strikes' experience offers valuable insights. With the right balance of technology and personal touch, the potential for success is limitless. Brad concluded, "It's about creating an environment where technology enhances the guest experience without detracting from it. Efficiency is key, but at the end of the day, we want every guest to leave with a smile." ●

