

Rise and Shine

Operators share their tips for breakfast success every morning.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Anecdotal, nutrition advocates have said so for decades, and recent restaurant industry research consistently demonstrates that it is also one of the most “habitual” dayparts for customers.

Operator Rodney Jackson of Birmingham, Alabama, agrees.

Breakfast is critical, he says—if not for his health, then certainly for his Restaurant. “We are a daytime business,” Jackson says of his FSU. “Breakfast, therefore, is pretty good for us. It’s a busy daypart.” Every day, Jackson serves breakfast from 6 a.m., when he opens, until 10:30 a.m. By 11 a.m., he says, his Restaurant has pulled in an average of \$3,000 in breakfast sales alone.

Breakfast currently makes up 17 percent of system-wide sales, and Chick-fil-A projections show that breakfast-time sales are an excellent opportunity for growth. “The average Chick-fil-A Operator does about \$1,600 a day in breakfast,” says Shane Benson, Chick-fil-A marketing management consultant. “Only 30 percent of FSUs average more than \$2,000 a day in breakfast. So, if 70 percent of the chain does less than \$2,000 in breakfast, there’s significant opportunity there for growth.”

There’s no denying that growing breakfast poses significant operational and sales challenges for Operators. “Breakfast is a hard dollar to make,” Jackson says. “You have to turn a lot of product to make a \$3,000- to \$5,000-breakfast,” which is why he is especially diligent to keep quality top-of-mind throughout the morning routine.



Shawn Willis uses holding procedures to serve fresh food.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Mission: Incredible Eggs

Operational Excellence demands both quality food and speed of service, all day long. At breakfast, however, delivering both can prove difficult. The reason, many Operators insist, is that at Chick-fil-A, the chicken—not the egg—came first.

“Currently, we don’t have an approved system for holding eggs,” says Jason Stanfield, a Restaurant process engineer with Chick-fil-A’s System Engineering Group. “Stores can’t cook eggs ahead of time and hold them somewhere, like they can with a lot of our products. They’re expected to cook eggs only when ordered, and that’s a challenge for speed of service.”

To help Operators grow their breakfast business, Chick-fil-A is developing new ways to help solve their egg quality challenges. One promising solution is a “breakfast holding system.” Currently being tested in a handful of Restaurants, it would allow Operators to hold eggs as they do other products and therefore pursue and execute larger breakfast volume. The holding system—which uses moisture-controlled heat to keep items both warm and fresh—features a variety of temperature settings and size configurations, making it ideal for a variety of Restaurants, including FSUs and Mall Units.

To help Operators build a bigger, better breakfast business, *OE* spoke with Operators about their breakfast challenges, as well as their best-kept secrets for breakfast success. Following are five of their favorite early-bird strategies for getting the proverbial worm.

1

Keep Quality at the Top of the List

To grow breakfast, focus firmly on Operational Excellence to serve high-quality food that looks good and tastes fresh, says Operator Shawn Willis of Burlington, North Carolina. "If you're going to sample breakfast, make sure it's an excellent product," he says, adding that perfection starts with strict holding procedures. "Holding procedures are extremely important and we do everything we can to follow those."

Specifically, Willis uses the "L-bracket" system, which enables his team members to be vigilant about freshness at every stage of food preparation. "Managers have got to walk through the kitchen on a regular basis," he says. "They've got to open drawers, ask questions, take temperatures and show folks that they're serious about serving good quality products."

Even when food is hot, Willis continues, Operators must make a habit of examining it—with their mouths and their eyes. "You can tell very easily, for instance, if Minis are old," he says. "When we cook them, we put a glaze of butter on them; when I get one that's not glistening on top, I know it's not fresh."

2

Sample Your Way to Success

In Houston, Texas, breakfast is big business thanks to the combined efforts of nearly 40 local Operators who decided in January 2008 to collaborate on a massive breakfast promotion. Hoping to drum up more morning business throughout the metro area, they pooled their resources to give away real food—one signature breakfast menu item—one day a week for five weeks.

Beginning the week of January 24, 2008, Houston-based Operators gave away a day's worth each of Chick-fil-A® Chicken Biscuits, Chicken Breakfast Burritos, Sausage Biscuits, Chick-n-Minis™ and Cinnamon Clusters. They promoted the giveaways in their Restaurants with bag stuffers and advertisements on local radio stations. The result was a significant surge in breakfast business all year long, according to Operator Matt Michaels of Humble, Texas, who gave away about a thousand Chick-fil-A® Chicken Biscuits in a single day during the promotion. "We did \$2,700

in breakfast that day, on top of giving away 1,100 biscuits," he says.

The growth in breakfast business wasn't temporary, either. When Michaels took over his Restaurant in 2007, the Store's breakfast revenues averaged \$1,634 a day. By mid-2008 they averaged \$2,700—thanks in large part to sampling. "You've got to get food in people's mouths," Michaels says. "If you can just get people to taste the food, you've got them."

Michaels recommends not only sampling inside your Store but also outside. During Houston's breakfast promotion, he gave free items to customers at the counter and to folks driving past his Restaurant, who had no intention of stopping. "Chick-fil-A was built on sampling," he says. "We don't have a food court sitting in front of us. But we do have streets where lots of people are passing our Store every day. While they're sitting at a stoplight, there's no better way to connect with them than giving them a Chick-fil-A® Chicken Biscuit and saying, 'See over there? That's a Chick-fil-A. Here's a Chicken Biscuit.'"

Willis adds he often gives away breakfast items during dinnertime to diners who are surprised to learn that Chick-fil-A serves breakfast.



3

Biscuits at Their Best

If fresh food is the crown that makes one's breakfast king, fresh biscuits are the crown jewel. "If anybody mentions anything about our breakfast," Willis says, "it's that our biscuits are good."

The key to baking the best biscuits, Michaels says, is to start with cold water, per procedure. Instead of mixing in water directly from the tap, his team first chills it, as colder water makes fluffier biscuits.

For Jackson—who recommends having a biscuit specialist, of sorts, who can bake perfect biscuits and train others—the best biscuits are the ones that are worked the least and baked the fastest. "We mix our dough as little as possible and work it as little as possible," he says. "The other key is not leaving your dough sitting on the counter for too long, as soon as we make our biscuits, we put them in the oven."

Fresh is best, agrees Willis. To keep his biscuits fresh and consistent, he again looks to the "L-bracket" system. "We put an 'L-bracket' next to the container of biscuit dough to ensure we do not hold that dough longer than the holding time allows," he says. "Once we roll and cut biscuits, the same number that was put with the bowl of dough is transferred to the biscuits on the pan so that we know, even once they're cut, that we have not held them longer than they were supposed to prior to cooking. Once we cook those biscuits, we put another 'L-bracket'—a new 'L-bracket'—on them that gives us how long we can hold them in the holding pan."



Operator Rodney Jackson performs a spot check at breakfast time.

4

Remember Speed of Service

Of course, it's not enough to serve good food, Michaels says. At breakfast time especially, he urges, Operators must serve good food fast. "During the breakfast daypart, we try to be exceedingly fast," Michaels says. "We feel like speed of service ensures that we have a very fresh product, and we figure that most people who are coming in the morning are already in a hurry; they're only going to stop by if it's a convenient experience."

Still, speed of service can be difficult sometimes, Jackson says, because some items, such as eggs, have no holding time and must be made to order. The only way to increase speed and volume, he says, is to increase the number of hands in your kitchen. "You can turn out Chicken Biscuits quickly, but a Chicken Burrito is a more labor-intensive product," Jackson says. "For us to be able to properly turn the product in volume, it requires having enough people working. If you're maxed out, you've got to have more people to grow."

5

Focus on Teamwork

Having the *right* people during the breakfast rush is critical. Because breakfast is typically so busy—its lower check average requires turning more transactions more quickly—teamwork is mandatory in order to achieve Operational Excellence, Michaels says. "You're serving breakfast, but you've also got prep to get done so that you can make the transition to lunch

smoothly. So, you need people who can work fast and work together." You also need a good closing crew, he says—to stock and clean the Restaurant for opening the next morning—and kitchen managers who are able to enforce quality while helping out on production. In other words, Willis says, Operators need people who do anything and everything, even at 6 a.m. "Breakfast isn't a balancing act," he concludes. "It's a dance. You've got to have speed and you've got to have great quality food. You can't have either/or; you've got to have both." **OE**

—Shawn Willis



For more information on sampling procedures, please visit @Chick-fil-A, keyword: *Brain Food*>>*Sales Building*. Then refer to *Job Aids*.