



HR e-Journal

INSIGHT



Technology on the Menu Supports Talent Management and Helps Restaurant Chain to Conserve Traditions

----- KAM KEE RESTAURANT GROUP

By implementing restaurant technology tools, Kam Kee Restaurant Group is able to manage its staff more effectively by investing in training and development.

Kam Kee cha chaan teng restaurants maintain quintessentially Hong Kong traditions through the use of technology to integrate work flows and processes into one cohesive management system.

For the Kam Kee Restaurant Group which operates a chain of cha chaan teng restaurants across Hong Kong, digital transformation provides benefits for customers, employees and the business. Amid ongoing talent shortages, from a business perspective, the efficiencies digital technologies create enables Kam Kee to deliver a convenient and enjoyable customer experience while supporting employees by streamlining the work flow, explains Roy Chan, Kam Kee Restaurant Group, Senior Marketing and Operation System Manager.

“By using an electronic ordering system we can save costs by improving efficiencies, but we are not trying to save costs on frontline staff salaries,” says Chan who explains that Kam Kee’s electronic ordering system is a response to changes in customer behaviour, largely driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen a dramatic switch to placing orders and making reservations through digital channels to reduce the contact between people. Currently, 75% or three out of every four orders are made using Kam Kee’s digital ordering system. “Factors such as customers’ familiarity with mobile applications, the popularity of takeout and the upsurge in the use of delivery platforms are all catalysts for digitalisation,” notes Chan.

Chan also notes how the change in customer behaviour has placed pressure on frontline staff and increased their workload, especially when processing takeout orders. “Previously, customers would queue up to make orders in person, but now they use apps and delivery platforms, which puts pressure on cashiers and waiters to process orders in a timely manner,” Chan says. While staff were initially concerned the introduction of the electronic ordering system would result in a reduction in employee headcount, the actual outcome is that staff are better supported and even receive skills training so they can help customers to use the electronic ordering system. According to the Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades, the catering sector currently has about 200,000 workers in about 17,000 establishments and is currently short of about 60,000 staff.

Like any forward-looking business, Chan says it is crucial for the Kam Kee Restaurant Group to respond to market forces. However, while Kam Kee is the first restaurant in Hong Kong’s cha chaan teng food and beverage industry to use an electronic ordering system, by harnessing the power of digital technology solutions the restaurant group is able to deliver a high standard of service while maintaining the time-honored characteristics of a Hong Kong-style restaurant by offering traditional food types using long-established preparation methods, often based on western-inspired dishes with a distinctly Cantonese twist.

Key Takeaways

- Wherever possible, digital solutions should complement business operations while supporting management and staff.
- The digitalisation of work processes does not necessarily lead to a reduction in headcount, but it does change the way that talent needs to be trained and how they work.
- Organisations stand to benefit the most when they integrate both digital solutions and people-centric strategies into their talent management objectives.
- Datasets that were unheard of only a few years ago can be utilised to build a game-changing talent management strategy.
- As the world of work evolves, digital solutions can be used to engage employees and create a culture that grows and retains talent within the organisation.

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Upskilling and streamlining training

From a talent management perspective, Johnson Ng, Kam Kee Restaurant Group Senior Human Resources & Administration Manager, explains how the restaurant groups' implementation of digital systems, means that employees need to acquire technical knowledge to provide better and higher-quality service, which helps to reshape and enhance their work skills and knowledge. For instance, the implementation of digitalisation means that the time saved can be used to train frontline employees how to maintain restaurant hygiene and carry out environmental management processes.

Furthermore, Ng says that, keeping in mind the chronic shortage of talent, over the long-term investing in upskilling staff saves resources on hiring and training new employees, and at the same time, lets employees know that they are an important part of the business. He adds that a major shift in Kam Kee's employee training is focused on ensuring that staff feel comfortable using technology. For instance, developing the confidence to use a mobile phone to demonstrate to customers how they can use the digital platform to place their order. "Of course, if a customer prefers to place their order in the traditional way, our staff are more than willing to assist them," Ng confirms.

During the pandemic, Ng explains that Kam Kee executed digitalisation across different areas of human resource management. For new joiners, this means that in place of face-to-face training, training content such as service processes and product standards is created in the form of videos, which employees are able to watch online. "Digital training adds a new dimension to helping us to maintain the stability and quality of our service and products," Ng says. For example, when creating training videos slow-motion and zoom-in techniques are used to highlight key points and add prominent text to ensure that employees learn food preparation methods, service standards, and company regulations. "This not only enables new employees to learn basic skills, but also saves time and manpower," Ng says. After a suitable period of time to allow new joiners to settle in, Kam Kee's employee training and development department evaluate work abilities and the related knowledge of new employees to ensure that their service and knowledge meet the expected standards. In terms of recruitment, Kam Kee also uses digital tools such as Zoom for interviews. "This not only saves time for both parties, but also ensures the health and safety of everyone involved," notes Ng.

With employee attendance a crucial part of an organisation's ability to maintain the effectiveness of the work system, Kam Kee switched from using paper-based attendance records to electronic cards to track employee attendance. "Employees only need to swipe their cards when they arrive and leave work each day," Ng says. Attendance records are uploaded to the cloud for the human resources

department to accurately record and calculate salaries. This not only reduces the consumption of paper, which contributes to environmental protection, it also makes the entire management process smoother, easier to manage and more efficient, says Ng.

Maintaining traditions in a new era

Established more than half a century ago and famous for its "Golden Signboard" signboard brand, Kam Kee spent almost two years developing its digital technology ordering system. "We wanted to introduce our digital ordering system without compromising our customer's options or cha chaan teng traditions," Chan says. When using the digital platform to make orders customers can still choose how sweet or how cold they would like their iced lemon tea and whether they want a straw. According to their preferences, customers can also request more or less onions, no chives or bean sprouts, less oil or less salt. Kam Kee's initiative to implement a digital ordering system, robot delivery service and integrating its point of sales system with its delivery platforms have recently secured the restaurant group two prestigious SME awards. Looking ahead, Chan believes by collating and utilising data created by Kam Kee's digital ordering system and payment platforms, the restaurant group will be in a stronger position to offer a wider range of customer preferences and develop business opportunities through marketing and interaction between the Group's different brands. Furthermore, Chan adds that digital tools can be used to determine to which branch or area resources need to be allocated. "It can even help us identify our weaknesses and where we should invest more resources to stimulate customer traffic," says Chan.

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