



MARY BROWN'S CHICKEN & TATERS CASE STUDY
Panasonic helps Canada's largest
chicken QSR feed its expansion plans

Panasonic

Mary Brown's Chicken & Taters has ambitious goals for growth across Canada and beyond – goals that require a solid technology foundation and a reliable IT partnership. Enter Panasonic's iQtouch point-of-sale solution and Clearview back office software. Together, they are helping one of Canada's fastest-growing franchises not only achieve its strategy for growth, but also dramatically improve its guest service.

⊕ CHALLENGE

Mary Brown's Chicken & Taters is the largest Canadian chicken quick-service restaurant (QSR) and one of Canada's fastest-growing franchises, according to the company. After nearly five decades of business, the company was poised for exponential growth, fueled by guest passion and product demand, but the company's point-of-sale (POS) system no longer provided a solid foundation to support the business.

⊗ SOLUTION

A series of Panasonic technological upgrades were installed. They provide a reliable and cost-effective solution to streamline processes and practices. Mary Brown's upgraded both its POS hardware and software. Accompanied by Panasonic's Clearview back-office software solution, the company has the technology to fully support its plans for growth. "I would stack the solution that's been provided against the best out there," Mary Brown's Corporate District Manager, Darren Durdle, declares.

✓ RESULT

The combination of Panasonic's iQtouch and Clearview back-office software has given Mary Brown's the stability and reliability needed in order taking and delivery, as well as in back office reconciliation and planning. For example, because of a new kitchen display, which updates workers on orders in real time as they're being entered by counter staff, orders are started 20 to 25 seconds sooner than previously possible.

History

Mary Brown's opened its first store in Newfoundland, Canada, in 1969. Within a short time, the brand expanded outside its home province to locations in Ontario, Nova Scotia, Alberta and beyond. The incredibly delicious fried chicken was quickly building a loyal fan base and gaining momentum. In 2007, the brand was acquired by Newfoundland entrepreneur, Gregory Roberts. Under his leadership, Mary Brown's growth accelerated rapidly, going from 67 stores to nearly 160 today. The brand has made considerable investments in modernizing, rebranding, menu innovation and much more, further fueling growth and enhancing guest loyalty.

But amid year-over-year growth, above industry-average sales and consecutive awards for franchisee satisfaction, Mary Brown's faced a serious challenge: its technology infrastructure was not keeping pace and could no longer support the chain's dramatic growth.

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Darren Durdle
Corporate District Manager,
Mary Brown's



The issue

As Mary Brown's approached its 50th anniversary, the brand needed a tech upgrade – and quickly. By 2016, restaurants were opening rapidly across the country as Guests tried and loved Mary Brown's 'Made Fresh from Scratch' Chicken & Taters – handcrafted in each store using farm fresh local ingredients, Mary's time-proven recipe and the chain's unique proprietary cooking methods.

But not all was ideal. The company's point-of-sale (POS) system proved increasingly unreliable and was going through unstable software upgrades and causing endless frustration.

Partners and franchisees expressed displeasure about the software's instability and aging hardware. Even more worrisome, the issues had become a barrier for guest service. Issues with the system took staff from serving guests to troubleshooting with the solution helpdesk, according to Mary Brown's Corporate District Manager, Darren Durdle.

"We wanted a reliable system so that we could focus on operations and service and not have to spend 30 minutes with the helpdesk at the start of our shifts," Mr. Durdle says. "It had become urgent for us to have a reliable point-of-sale system that was stable and easy to use."

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MOVING FORWARD

The implementation of these new technologies clearly achieved Mary Brown's main goal of a stable POS solution to build out their expansion plans. Beyond that, there have been additional benefits including employees spending less time on the phone with helpdesks and more time doing what they do best. "The staff can focus on guest experience and taking service to next level," Mr. Durdle explains. "It's a big change from the frustration staff used to feel at spending a chunk of their time on the phone."

Mr. Durdle has led the Mary Brown's software project since its inception three years ago. The company has nearly completed the rollout to its existing locations with only three stores remaining – for now. The company plans to add the iQtouch solutions to all its future restaurants – and that's a big order. An expansion of the Panasonic software solutions is currently underway with Mary Brown's as the brand speeds toward its goal of 200 stores by 2020.

"I constantly get feedback that it makes everyone's job much easier, and they ask: 'Where was this solution was five years ago?'" Mr. Durdle says. "We've simplified the process across the board, from the cashiers to the managers, and that makes me confident that we made the right decision."

Finding the right fit

Mary Brown's technology and business teams sought to find the perfect fit to support the company's growth and expanding infrastructure well into the future. After addressing software and hardware pain-points – and finalizing the tech wish-list to support the company's aggressive expansion plans – the tech decision-makers worked with the Panasonic team to customize a solution, including the upgrade of point-of-sale hardware and accompanying iQtouch and its Clearview software.

About the technology

iQtouch is Panasonic's comprehensive QSR POS software solution that promotes accurate and efficient order entry while enhancing overall guest experience. Using a conversational model, the software streamlines order taking – helping to reduce errors and wait times at the counter and drive-thru, while maximizing output. Panasonic's Clearview solution is a highly flexible and scalable web-based software package for financial management, food cost management and labour management, specifically designed for the food service industry.

"The hardware is very reliable and is grouped with fantastic software," Mr. Durdle says. "Before iQtouch, stability was something we lacked for POS and there was a lot of frustration."

As soon as the appropriate solutions were identified, Panasonic and Mary Brown's started testing the software to understand how it would integrate with the rest of the restaurant brand's tech infrastructure. The goal was to make implementation as seamless and painless as possible.

Implementing the solution

After successful testing, Mary Brown's launched the new technology in one location and monitored results for nearly a year. Following success of the pilot location, Mary Brown's decided to switch all their restaurants to Panasonic's iQtouch and its Clearview back office solution, beginning with corporate-owned sites. Working closely with decision-makers at Mary Brown's, the Panasonic team took a consultative approach to implementation, based on best practices and an in-depth

understanding of Mary Brown's history, priorities and future goals. This included weekly status meetings and immediate discussion as questions came up. As a result, Mr. Durdle said each installation was easier than the last. When it comes to any major tech upgrade, managers, franchisees and other staff often feel normal anxieties. To address this, Panasonic created an online training site with resources and an operating manual specific to Mary Brown's.

It was a "huge" benefit that contributed to the smooth transition, according to Mr. Durdle. "The transition was seamless. After we did our first 10 locations, any issues we had at the start were no longer a problem," he said. "We were very fortunate to have our teams properly prepared prior to rollout."

Today, Panasonic's iQtouch and Clearview software solutions are implemented in 150 Mary Brown's locations.

The proof is in the "potatoes"

Implementing this suite of solutions has streamlined various processes and generated impressive efficiencies for Mary Brown's restaurants. According to Mr. Durdle, the technology helps them perform at a totally different level. One specific result is a notable increase in kitchen efficiency, substantially enhanced by the installation of a new Panasonic display in the food prep area.

The new display shows orders in real time as they're being made at the counter. This gives the kitchen staff a head start and saves 20 to 25 seconds of time to make each order – a major increase in productivity, according to Mr. Durdle. The restaurants have also seen an improvement in the ease of ordering as the result of a simplified order-taking process that includes auto prompts for different menu items. This procedure also has had a positive impact on order accuracy, efficiency and ultimately, guest satisfaction.

What's more, the technology upgrade has helped Mary Brown's streamline bookkeeping and financial planning processes. Prior to the installation, the company didn't have fully integrated merchant services, but iQtouch allows Mary Brown's to link to its bank for reconciliation and any paperwork. This solution has made checks and balances quicker and eased the administrative burden at the restaurants.