HotSchedules®

Success Story: Lazy Dog Cafe
You Can Teach a Restaurant New Tricks

The Lazy Dog Cafe was created in 2003 by the executive team from Mimi's Restaurants. Owner Chris Simms based the concept on his childhood vacationing experiences in Jackson Hole, Wyoming where he learned the true meaning of small town hospitality.

The Lazy Dog Cafe offers full service dining with eight locations throughout Southern California, and a 20 percent annual growth plan. They've expanded with a new location in West Covina, California.

Head chef at the Lazy Dog Cafe is Chef Gabe Caliendo, or "Chef Gabe" as everyone knows him. Chef Gabe began his career in the kitchen early, working at his parents' deli at just seven years of age. Today, he plans the menus for all Lazy Dog Cafe locations and also writes a regular column for *Great Taste Magazine*—the premiere connection for key decision makers in the Southern California restaurant industry.

As the Lazy Dog Cafe concept grew, the team realized pretty quickly that they were going to need to adopt more sophisticated tools to help them be more efficient. At the top of the list, they identified the need for a more robust employee scheduling and labor management tool than the one that they were using. Although it was an enterprise level sales and labor reporting solution, it lacked sufficient reporting, POS integration, and the more modern toolsets for managers to achieve scheduling efficiency and effectiveness.

The Dog Days are Over

In early 2011, the Lazy Dog Cafe team brought on Anthony Mejia as IT Director. At the time, they were testing HotSchedules in two locations to determine if it was the right labor management solution. Since Mejia had used HotSchedules with his previous employer, he was well aware of the benefits the labor management solution could provide.

In a Snapshot

Their Story

With eight locations throughout Southern, California. and a 20% growth plan, Lazy Dog Cafe knew they needed a way to manage their operations. Realizing their enterprise solution wasn't sophisticated enough to give them the forecasting and reporting functionality they needed, they moved to HotSchedules and haven't looked back.

Challenges

- Needed a more robust labor management and employee scheduling tool as they grew.
- Difficulty keeping the entire team up to date on important news and announcements.
- Required specific help with California's complex staff break rules and regulations.

Products

- HotSchedules
- Meal Period Planner

Results

- 75% reduction in time to generate schedules.
- Labor cost savings with enforced punctuality.
- Improved communications and management efficiencies.

75% reduction in schedule creation.

Immediate labor savings using punctuality control.

Avoided high cost of meal period litigation.

"Once it was decided that we needed to move away from our enterprise tool, the references for HotSchedules were overwhelming. It was actually proposed by many managers who had used the tool in previous positions. It was clear from the beginning that HotSchedules was best in class," says Mejia.

With that decision finalized, all of the Lazy Dog Cafe managers were trained on the HotSchedules solution. The HotSchedules team hosted an online training program for the managers, who found the scheduler and communications portal to be quite intuitive.

Today, the team relies on HotSchedules' online training as a refresher or when new managers are brought on board. Mejia noted, "Now with HotSchedules' self-paced online training videos it is really a solution that takes care of itself."

The next order of business was to integrate HotSchedules with their POS system, and Mejia already knew this would be as easy as it gets. He noted, "In my experience, the POS integration to Micros, POSitouch and Aloha is very easy. The program installs nicely in the restaurant and syncs with all the employee information in a matter of minutes. Plus, there is no new hardware that needs to be introduced for the product to work—it just layers on top of the POS server. As an IT professional, I have a particular appreciation for that."

Mejia also values the stability of the HotSchedules website. "There have been times when general maintenance will occur on HotSchedules servers which will take the site down; however, they utilize their communication tools to notify management and staff and those hours are typically after 3 a.m and before 6 a.m."

Wag More

With the rollout and implementation complete, Lazy Dog Cafe was off and running. The toolsets available in the scheduler greatly reduced the time needed to create and maintain the schedule. Since employee availability is built right into the system, there's no need to keep track of requests-off in various forms. Managers can also work on future schedules and create templates for holidays and special events.

"After adopting HotSchedules, we cut the time needed to create a schedule by 75 percent," says Mejia. "Managers who were new to HotSchedules immediately bought into it based on the time savings

> **With the POS integration, we were able to enforce clock-in times, cutting labor costs immediately.**
>
> -Anthony Mejia,
> IT Director,
> Lazy Dog Cafe

alone. The staff also appreciates being able to input vacation or school schedules into the tool and swap shifts with each other online."

Perhaps more critical than the time savings is the cost savings that the Lazy Dog Cafe has achieved since rolling out HotSchedules. "With the POS integration, we were able to enforce clock-in times, cutting labor costs immediately," says Mejia. "We limit our team members to two minutes early for clocking-in and zero minutes late. If you are late it will require a management swipe and the opportunity for the manager to coach the team member."

Overtime alerts also help managers track actual time worked so that they aren't accidentally putting team members into overtime. "You can configure an alert once a certain threshold of hours is reached. It will warn you that by putting that team member into that shift, you will be taking them into overtime," explains Mejia. "It's a feature we use daily to ensure we aren't spending money unnecessarily."

The Lazy Dog Cafe locations are also setting up HotSchedules' Meal Period Plan module to help manage the tedious process of complying with California's staff-break rules. These laws are often complex and vary from state-to-state, so keeping up with them is challenging. HotSchedules Meal Period Plan plugs required breaks into the schedule to prevent managers from scheduling through mandatory breaks. Avoiding the high costs of meal period break litigation is just one more way HotSchedules helps keep expenses down.

Bow WOW!

While online employee scheduling may be the first feature that comes to mind when people think of HotSchedules, it is by no means the only feature. Effective communication with employees is also critical.

"Today, it can still be a challenge to make sure that your entire organization is on the same page about certain communications," notes Mejia. "We have found that HotSchedules is one of the few places that every team member must access, creating the perfect place to do global announcements."

HotSchedules Logbook offers yet another tool to track important communications about shift activities, staff performance and record-keeping. And, unlike clipboards and emails, HotSchedules Logbook is always in the same place, available to anyone with the proper permissions, and is quickly searchable. "We have been using Logbook for almost a year and all the history we have logged is still right there and easily accessible."

HotSchedules makes scheduling and communication even more accessible with its employee scheduling app. Smartphone users can access the Logbook, schedules and contact information as needed using their phone. This allows employees and managers to be in touch with the store and on top of store operations, even when they aren't on site. Mejia has the employee scheduling app on his personal iPhone, and can't say enough great things about it. "Employees use their phone to message fellow employees, to be alerted when a new schedule posts, to request shift trades, and view shift trade decisions made by management. It's all right there for them," he says.

> **HotSchedules absolutely contributes to management efficiencies, improved communications, and, most importantly, lower labor hours and costs.**
>
> -Anthony Mejia,
> IT Director, Lazy Dog Cafe

Even for those less technically adept, or in cases when smartphones are lost or wireless access is on the fritz, HotSchedules has a solution. "HotSchedules has an Interactive voice-response phone system that can be accessed in either English or Spanish. Their support team is also incredibly capable and helpful to anyone calling in, and they are available to you for as long as you have HotSchedules. But I would recommend setting up a terminal in the staff room where people can access it if they need to. All you need is Internet and a mouse and keyboard."

New Tricks

HotSchedules also offers a number of different reports to help manage labor information. One of Mejia's preferred reports is the Labor Proforma, which shows sales and labor distribution numbers by job and department. "We constantly watch our labor to maintain our desired percentage. HotSchedules Labor Proforma has a wealth of information to help you manage that more accurately," says Mejia.

"One of the nicest parts about HotSchedules is that it pulls the sales and labor hours and dollars from the POS and compares them against what was scheduled. It can then be a predictor of future expectations, and helps us ensure we have the right people and the right number of people on the floor when we need them."

The Lazy Dog Cafe also enjoys HotSchedules' custom Floor Maps and the Daily Roster Report. "The Roster Report is broken down by job and part of day. It's completely configurable by department, in and out times and many other variables," he adds.

HotSchedules has clearly been beneficial to Mejia and the crew at Lazy Dog Cafe's eight locations, but in an industry where margins are already paper-thin, can they honestly say that it delivers a quick and enduring return on investment? Apparently so. "I won't even consider a product if I can't justify the expense," Mejia states. "It doesn't belong there in the first place if I can't. HotSchedules absolutely contributes to management efficiencies, improved communications, and most importantly, lower labor hours and costs. It's just one more reason to love HotSchedules."