Management Information Systems[90]

Each company-operated bakery-café had programmed point-of-sale registers to collect transaction data used to generate pertinent information, including transaction counts, product mix, and average check. All company-owned bakery-café product prices were programmed into the system from the company's corporate headquarters. The company allowed franchisees to have access to certain proprietary bakery-café systems and systems support. The fresh dough facilities had information systems that accepted electronic orders from the bakery-cafés and monitored delivery of the ordered product. The company also used proprietary online tools such as eLearning to provide online training for retail associates and online baking instructions for its bakers.

Panera's intranet site, The Harvest, allowed the company to monitor important analytics and provide support to its bakery-cafés. For example, Panera used a weather application on its intranet that tied a bakery-café's historic local weather to the store's historic sales, allowing managers to forecast sales based on weather for any given day. "That helps in staffing and how you're going to allocate labor and what you need in terms of materials," said Greg Rhoades, Panera's senior manager in information services. He called The Harvest "our single source of information." Panera shared news with its employees about food safety and customer satisfaction websites and provided information on daily sales, hourly sales, staffing, product sales, labor costs, and ingredient costs.[91]

The company began offering Wi-Fi in its bakery-cafés in 2003. By 2010, most bakery-cafés provided customers with free Internet access through a managed Wi-Fi network. As a result, Panera hosted one of the largest free public Wi-Fi networks in the country.[92]

In 2010, Panera began to pilot test a loyalty program, "My Panera," in 23 stores. Rather than just a food-discounting program, "My Panera" was intended to provide a deeper relationship with the customer by including participants in events such as the food tasting of new products. The company expected to complete the pilot by year-end 2010 and hoped to begin leveraging the data to better understand its high-frequency customers and to "surprise and delight" them in a way that was tailored to the customers' buying habits.[93]

Human Resources[94]

From the beginning, Panera realized that the key ingredients to the successful development of the Panera brand ranged from the type of food it served to the kind of people behind the counters. The company placed a priority on staffing its bakery-cafés, fresh dough facilities, and support center operations with skilled associates and invested in training programs to ensure the quality of its operations. As of December 29, 2009, the company employed approximately 12,000 full-time associates (defined as associates who average 25 hours or more per week), of whom approximately 600 were employed in general or administrative functions, principally in the company's support centers; approximately 1200 were employed in the company's fresh dough facility operations; and approximately 10,300 were employed in the company's bakery-café operations as bakers, managers, and associates. The company also had approximately 13,200 part-time hourly associates at the bakery-cafés. There were no collective bargaining agreements. The company considered its employee relations to be good.

Panera believed that providing bakery-café operators the opportunity to participate in the success of the bakery-cafés enabled the company to attract and retain experienced and highly motivated personnel, which resulted in a better customer experience. Through a Joint Venture Program, the company provided selected general managers and multi-unit managers with a multi-year bonus program based upon a percentage of the cash flows of the bakery-café they operated. The intent of the program's five-year period was to create team stability, generally