

Customer Profile

Fifer's Seafood trades on family tradition with a modern twist

Managing a fresh seafood market and restaurant comes second nature to Tracy Fifer, a third-generation Marylander whose grandfather opened a seafood carryout in the heart of Baltimore in 1950. After learning the trade from their father, Tracy and his two younger brothers opened the door to Fifer's Seafood, a casual dining restaurant, seven years ago in a small shopping plaza in Pasadena, Maryland. Now serving fresh crab that hails from as far away as the west coast, Tracy has learned a thing or two about how to cook fresh seafood-and more importantly, how to profitably run a restaurant.

After developing a marketing campaign around an 'all you can eat' menu to get the word out among the locals, Tracy turned his focus to improving the restaurant's operations. "We were doing it the old-fashioned way with pencil and paper" said Tracy, "but that came at a steep price. During a busy weekend we would lose between \$300 and \$500 due to ticket mistakes and delays-the wrong food would be cooked because the kitchen staff couldn't read the tickets, the wait staff would forget to add a second or third drink order and a carry-out order would create chaos because no one knew how to schedule it." The other trouble spot in his operations was controlling inventory, especially the alcohol served from the bar. As Tracy stated, "Close to 30



percent of our business is alcohol, and if we can't make money there, we're in trouble." With a packed bar and thirsty customers, Tracy saw his profit evaporating each week and couldn't get a handle on the shortages that were showing up when checking inventory.

"I knew it was time to make a change about three years ago," stated Tracy. We were getting more business, but our profit was sinking faster than a lead weight on a fishing rod. I started investigating POS systems, knowing that I wanted a system that could be easily customized to fit our needs. After receiving a sales call from Dan Youngblood at Technology Marketing, a full-service distributor of ASI's Restaurant Manager® POS, I spent some time with them and several of their customers to see how it could benefit our operations. I was really interested in the return on my investment because we'd have to install four terminals and purchase as many handhelds. After making the decision to invest in Restaurant Manager, I worked very closely with them to customize the menu items on the display screens. One of the first things we did was to build the inventory into the system, so every time a drink was served, it would register in the computer so I would know when it was time to reorder." Tracy acknowledged that he would never reach a perfect balance with inventory due to breakage and the occasional complimentary drink, so now when he sees a weekly variance of 10 bottles of beer, he isn't very concerned. "Thanks to the tracking capability of Restaurant Manager, I don't have to double-check every ticket to make sure all the drinks have been tracked."

Shortly after the POS terminals were installed, Tracy worked with Technology Marketing to implement the Write-On Handheld units. "Even though the POS stations were in the same room, I felt we were losing too much time between writing down the order,

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Owner, Fifer's Seafood



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walking to the POS system and then re-entering the same order.” Not so with the hand held units. “Not only have we eliminated double ordering, we’ve also increase our table turns by two to three times which makes a huge impact to our profitability on busy weekends.” Customers benefit from the speedy turn around of their food orders, giving them more time to relax and chat with the wait staff. “I really encourage the waiters to become acquainted with our clientele, many of who are repeat customers,” states Tracy. “People like to eat where they feel comfortable, and many of the locals consider our restaurant one of their hidden treasures.” The next tool implemented by Tracy was the Restaurant Manager carryout module. Fifer’s Seafood was one of the first local seafood restaurants to promote carryout service. “It made perfect sense to me to offer carryout, and our customers love it,” states Tracy. “Restaurant Manager’s module allowed me to seamlessly integrate this function into our operation, and we now generate close to 40% of our business with carryout and delivery orders.”

Tracy was very pleased at the response from his long-time wait staff when he told them about the new POS system. “It was very easy to train them on the terminals-people today are very comfortable with portable devices and it makes ordering a snap,” said Tracy. “To be honest, the system practically runs itself, and when I have a new hire, I simply ask one of my staff to train the new waiter.”

Tracy estimates that he spent close to \$30,000 to implement the entire system. “I know for a fact that it paid for itself in less than six months,” said Tracy. “We’re a family run business and I don’t do anything that doesn’t make good financial sense.” And when the store next to Fifer’s closed down last year, Tracy expanded their restaurant, adding a large bar section with additional tables to attract the sports crowd. “Restaurant Manager was able to grow right along with us,” says Tracy. “Every once in a while my brothers and I talk about opening up another location, and when we do, you can be sure that Restaurant Manager will be coming along with us.”

Fifer’s Seafood Restaurant Facts:

Opened in 2000. Currently has one location in Pasadena, MD

Most popular menu items:

All You Can Eat menu, homemade crab cakes and shrimp salad.

Seats: 35+ bar stools; 57 table seats

Staff: 5 to 10 between bartender and waiters

Average check: \$35

Hours: Open 7 days a week plus carryout/delivery

Website: www.fifersseafood.com

Most revenue generated in a single day: \$14,000

POS: Restaurant Manager; 5 touch screens; Online Ordering