

TECHNOLOGY

Restaurant operators sing the praises of Private Label Radio

By Alan J. Liddle

Technology that aids chain marketing and in-store messaging is music to the ears of some operators who use Private Label Radio from DMI Music & Media Solutions and Antex Electronics.

Both the Subway and Cheeburger Cheeburger chains recently launched their own branded, in-store "radio" networks — systems that download, manage and play music collections tailored to customers' tastes. The subscription Private Label Radio service also supports in-restaurant airing of national or regional radio commercials, messaging about in-store specials and services, such as catering, and the distribution of employee training materials.

"I really like the brand reinforcement we achieve through Subway Radio," said franchisee Mark Leonard of San Francisco. "To have Subway messages in-store with a good blend of music is actually pretty exciting."

Subway Radio programming was developed by DMI in conjunction with Miami-based Independent Purchasing Cooperative, or IPC, the franchisee-owned buying organization of the Subway chain. The network is in place in 34 states and five Canadian provinces at more than 1,000 franchised branches of the sandwich chain, which is based in Milford, Conn., and has more than 26,000 units in 84 countries.

Debuting in the Los Angeles market this past February, Subway Radio quickly was in place in more than 350 units in that region, DMI sources indicated.

Private Label Radio, or PLR, is part of the evolving world of music branding and distribution for retailers and restaurateurs. PlayNetwork of Redmond, Wash., one such service, compiles custom music libraries and messages for multiunit operators and offers network distribution and programmable player technology. DMX Music Inc.

of Austin, Texas, also provides some, if not all, of those services and technologies.

In creating music programming and messages that resonate with a client's customers, PLR combines Pasadena-based DMI's expertise with Antex Electronics' Media Director 2 technology. MD2 consists of management software with an audio-file server as its hardware.



Fort Myers, Fla.-based Cheeburger Cheeburger Restaurants Inc. said its "Cheeburger Radio," a link to which is available at its website, shown here, gives customers promotions and product information.

Representatives of Antex of Torrance, Calif., said the MD2 server in each restaurant subscribing to PLR downloads content and playback instructions at set times during the day. Once downloaded, the instructions are automatically integrated into the system and the content is

stored in the server's 40-gigabyte hard drive. At the appropriate time, MD2, which supports programming of volume levels and has lockout controls, initiates playback of the music or other content, the Antex officials said.

According to Antex, the programming flexibility of the MD2 system makes it possible for users to create ancillary revenue streams by broadcasting in their restaurants advertisements they sell to other businesses targeting the same customers. It was unclear at presstime if any users of Subway Radio or Cheeburger Radio were generating such revenues.

Bob Wright, director of marketing for Cheeburger Cheeburger Restaurants Inc. of Fort Myers, Fla., described Cheeburger Radio as a "wonderful marketing tool." He said it provides customers of the 50-plus-unit chain with "valuable information about new menu items, specials and promotions."

Private Label Radio representatives said the Cheeburger Radio network is functional in more than a dozen existing branches of the chain and would be deployed in new units. There is a Cheeburger Radio player accessible at the chain's website at www.cheeburger.com.

Restaurants must have speakers and an amplifier and a dial-up or broadband Internet connection to support a PLR installation. DMI recommends that clients use a broadband connection.

Private Label Radio general manager Robert Walker declined to provide pricing specifics but indicated that the monthly per-unit subscription fee can vary, depending on the number of units a chain signs up for the service, among other things.

He said PLR offers new customers a self-installation option that cuts the cost of a technician visit. The self-install mode is supported by a toll-free hotline, Walker added. ■

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NEWS DIGESTS

Buca books Lawson to upgrade legacy apps

MINNEAPOLIS — Looking to enhance financial reporting and accelerate decision making, Italian dinnerhouse operator Buca Inc., based here, has selected Lawson Software's Enterprise Financial Management, Supply Chain and Business Intelligence suites.

"By helping us centralize and automate our business systems across our restaurants, the Lawson applications will give us greater insight into the company's financial reporting and help us make better, faster business decisions," said Dennis Goetz, vice president and chief accounting officer at Buca, parent of the 93-unit Buca di Beppo chain.

Lawson, of St. Paul, Minn., said Buca's new software would standardize processes between the corporate financial system and store bookkeeping, and provide real-time access to accounting and supply chain data.

Rock Bottom, Dickey's give nod to Altametrics

LOS ALAMITOS, CALIF. — Rock Bottom Restaurants Inc. of Louisville, Ky., and Dickey's Barbecue Restaurants Inc. of Dallas chose multiple eRestaurant back-office or enterprise applications from Altametrics, the technology vendor said.

Sources at Los Alamitos-based Altametrics said Rock Bottom had selected eRestaurant workforce management, supply chain and demand planning, and cash and sales software. Dickey's, they said, had selected

suites for restaurant food and inventory management, polling and cash management.

Rock Bottom operates 94 casual-dining restaurants and franchises an additional 24 Old Chicago outlets. Chief information officer Jeff Gengler said eRestaurant tools would "allow our operators to serve customers and staff even better by streamlining what is required of them in the back office."

Roland Dickey Jr., chief executive of Dickey's Barbecue, which has more than 70 company and franchisee-operated units, said Altametric's technology would support his chain's aggressive growth and "streamline the flow of information from restaurants to our headquarters."

Denny's backs MenuLink back-office aid

SPARTANBURG, S.C. — Family feeder Denny's Corp., based here, with 540 company restaurants and 1,025 franchised units, is using MenuLink software for back-office chores in corporate stores, chain officials confirmed.

Representatives of MenuLink, a division of Atlanta-based Radiant Systems Inc., said Denny's officials credit MenuLink with producing faster and more accurate labor schedules, compared with prior systems. The vendor said the chain expects the software to help reduce food costs and improve reporting and will recommend the application to franchisees.

"We've worked very closely with [MenuLink's] support and implementation teams to develop functionality that enables our managers to invest more time in serving guests," said Sean Dugan of Denny's.

Cheesecake Factory employs QSR Automations

CALABASAS HILLS, CALIF. — ConnectSmart Kitchen technology from QSR Automations is being deployed by The Cheesecake Factory Inc. at new branches of its namesake casual-dining chain, and is being retrofitted at the company's seven Grand Lux Cafe sites, the vendor said.

Cheesecake Factory's two concepts generate average annual per-location volumes exceeding \$10 million and feature menus of 150 to 200 items. The Calabasas Hills-based company is looking to the graphically oriented CSK management system "to more effectively and efficiently synchronize our kitchen operations," said Rick Smith, Cheesecake Factory's recently retired chief information officer.

The CSK system supports user customization of what each kitchen station sees as part of the production process and can display menu cards, among other functions. Louisville, Ky.-based QSR Automations said Cheesecake Factory is deploying CSK tools in the 21 Cheesecake Factory units scheduled to open in 2006.

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