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September 27th, 2013 | TAGS: **TECHNOLOGY**

## 10 aha's from FSTEC

By **Peter Romeo**, Vice President & Editorial Director

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If you weren't at FSTEC, the industry's Woodstock for technology-minded executives from all headquarters departments, here are 10 reasons why you're less smart today than the attendees. Heck, the very diversity of that audience is enough reason to call you a goober for missing it.



**Learning 1:** They know technology should now be as much of a preoccupation for marketing and human resources departments as it has been for the IT staff. And add the CEO to the roster as well. You could practically hear the silos crumble as people who don't know an ASP from their elbow were hailing the sales building power they've been handed by social media and transactional data. HR specialists were similarly wistful about what they can do in the area of automated screening, onboarding, scheduling, training, and compensation, all thanks to the people whose job they once viewed as keeping the computers running.

**Learning 2:** Plate presentation is likely to get more attention because of its newfound marketing value, a result of photo-based social sites like Pinterest and Instagram. Disney, for instance, has an initiative to upgrade presentations for that very reason, according to Allen Fazio, vice president of business technology strategic planning for the entertainment giant. "That's becoming more important to us for marketing than things like location" when consumers are choosing a restaurant via their phone, he explained.

That assertion was supported by the comments of his college-aged daughter, who appeared on a panel with her dad. The session was intended to show how differently Millennials and Baby Boomers view technology. That goal was definitely achieved. Ashley Fazio, for instance, noted that she chooses a restaurant not on the basis of menu or price, but because of the pictures she sees on her phone of the places under consideration.

**Learning 3:** If you think social media has to be navigated at breakneck speed today, tighten your helmet straps. Louis Basile, founder and president of the Phoenix-area chain Wildflower Bread Co., said his operation tries to respond to a guest posting within three hours. "Three hours is too long. I think we have to respond within an hour," said Basile. Tressie Lieberman, director of digital and social marketing for Taco Bell, spoke about monitoring social media in real time for instantaneous reactions or adjustments by the home office.

**Learning 4:** New technology will vaporize long lines and crowded waiting areas, like the space fight in front of the hostess' stand. Celebrity chef Robert Irvine said technology is already available to text or call customers on a wait list instead of buzzing them via a clunky pager. He also mentioned iPad apps that would allow customers to order from their car while waiting in the drive-thru lane.

**Learning 5:** Paper will similarly be endangered within restaurants by technology. Electronic ordering systems of all types, from smart phones to tablets to kiosks, were frequently measured in presentations and casual networking conversations alike. Paper tickets are also on their way out, according to Irvine. With orders placed digitally and transmitted wirelessly to the bar and kitchen, tabs can't be lost or misread, and the orders are placed much faster.

**Learning 6:** Youngsters like meetings. Or at least they were in considerable attendance at FSTEC, a marked change from the gathering of elders that typifies most industry conferences. As speaker after speaker attested, younger employees are embracing technologies their greyer colleagues may fear. Their numbers at the

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conference shows that they're not adverse to old forms of educations, like trade shows.

**Learning 7:** The next rock stars of the business world, restaurants included, will be "data scientists"—the brains who can plunge into mountains of data and come away with insights and actionable information. It's the logical outcome of the Big Data phenomenon, whereby operators are buried in stats. Data scientists would spelunk into those mountains of information and climb out with insights.

**Learning 8:** One of the fast-casual sector's many, many advantages over more mature segments is the blank slate enjoyed by many chains in that market when it comes to technology. They're not saddled with what was politely called legacy systems, or clunky old hardware and software that have lapsed light years behind the state of the art. John Chidsey recounted how Burger King and its franchisees were using 54 POS systems when he rose to the CEO's post about a decade ago. The chain was riddled with old technology, not to mention a ridiculous lack of uniformity. Those issues largely don't exist for fast-casual chains.

**Learning 9:** Servers' jobs will be made easier by technology. Not only will iPad menus enable customers to input or adjust orders themselves, but their programmability to present wine suggestions, or pair wines or beer with a food item, will spare waiters and waitresses from having to learn and remember that much more information. Their memory will be in a tablet.

**Learning 10:** The threshold to meet on customer review sites like UrbanSpoon or Yelp is a "like" rating of 85% or higher, according to Disney's Fazio.

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