

church's chicken:

Finds cost-effective and employee-effective food safety training

“E. coli.” “Allergic Reaction.” “Food Poisoning.” These terms can make your stomach turn, but they aren’t at the front of your mind as you eat at your favorite restaurant. Church’s Chicken wants to keep it that way. “We take food safe handling practices very seriously at Church’s,” says Jim Parrish, EVP and Chief Operating Officer. For over 55 years, Church’s has specialized in the delivery of quick-service home-cooked chicken and side items. Part of the company’s philosophy is to **prepare their food with great care and attention**. It keeps them ahead of the competition, and keeps their customers coming back for more.

Teaching the specifics of food preparation and restaurant operations is part of Steve Heissner’s job. Heissner is Director of National Field Training for Church’s Chicken and handles training for over 1500 domestic locations. Food safety is one of the most important topics covered. “Food safety is never an issue until you have an incident. Of course, the idea is never to have an incident,” said Heissner. That’s the goal the company strives for, and effective food safety training is an important way to meet that goal. Unfortunately, the existing food safety training program was creating some challenges.



Challenges in the Old System

“Our food safety training was being handled via ServSafe and in their environment,” said Heissner. In that environment, Church’s ordered training materials, signed employees up for classes, and asked them to do pre-class preparation. Employees then attended the training class, which concluded with the certification exam. If the employee prepared properly and the classroom instructor did their job, the employee passed the exam. If they didn’t, the

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process started over. The failure rate was higher than Heissner would have liked. “It’s always a challenge to ask people to do homework before their class,” said Heissner. “Plus we had a lot of employees whose first language was Spanish and the training materials were only offered in English.”

In addition, the ebb and flow of new hires created an ever-changing need for the company. “We may have 50 employees to train in the next couple of weeks and then five in month after that, yet classes are only offered on a set schedule,” explained Heissner. “The system we were using wasn’t convenient, timely or particularly cost-effective.” Hard costs included materials, classroom fees, testing and re-testing. Soft costs were also a significant factor. They included absorbing a full day’s salary for classroom time and productivity losses at the restaurant while employees were away for training.

While making a change to their food safety training provider wasn’t a number one priority, the challenges the existing system created pushed Heissner to look at the market to see if there was a better solution.

Shopping Around

Heissner decided to consider an online solution for food safety training.

Online training would allow employees to be trained as needed, and when it was most convenient for the restaurant’s schedule. However, because food safety was such an important topic Heissner wanted to ensure that any new provider provided quality in addition to convenience. “If we made a change, it was important to get it right,” said Heissner.

As a starting point, several online food safety vendors did a presentation for Heissner demonstrating their products and capabilities. Based upon those presentations, Heissner selected a few for pilot programs. He wanted to road-test the products to determine how employees responded to the new medium. He was also curious to see whether passage rates on the certification exams would improve. Vendors chosen for the pilots included MindLeaders, ServSafe’s online offering and the courses offered by Training Achievement Program (TAP).



During the pilot program, Heissner reviewed the overall content presentation offered by each vendor. Pilot participants took the training, and were then tested to see the effectiveness of the preparation. In addition, the overall administration requirements for each program were evaluated. As the pilot period came to a close, MindLeaders emerged as the clear winner on each criteria evaluated. “MindLeaders had far and away the best content presentation,” said Heissner. “If you think about the typical audience, they are used to more enticing interfaces such as video games. The other presentations were too pedestrian to keep their attention.”

Heissner also liked the **bi-lingual capability of MindLeaders’ training**. “Having employees learn in their first language makes the whole process easier and more reliable,” said Heissner. During the 30 day MindLeaders pilot, 18 participants took the training and all but one passed the exam. The one that failed didn’t finish the training. Heissner was pleased with those results.



From Pilot to Implementation

“Because the pilot went so well, we went straight to implementation,” said Heissner. “**The process was very easy.**” MindLeaders provided Heissner with brochures, PowerPoint presentations, and manuals to help with the rollout. Heissner customized those materials for Church’s implementation, and promoted the new program at business review and marketing meetings held throughout the nation. Bringing the training to Church’s over 1500 domestic locations wasn’t difficult. “All restaurants are online from a company standpoint,” said Heissner. “Computers are ubiquitous now so having available equipment was no problem.”

Software hasn’t been an issue either. “We’ve had no technical hitches at all,” said Heissner. “The only challenge we’ve had so far is proctoring for the exams.” In order for employees to be able to take the exam onsite, a certified proctor must be available. If one isn’t, then employees have to go to a hard-wall facility for their exams. Initially this caused some concern with franchisees, but once Heissner explained how easy it was to become a proctor it became a non-issue. “I think we probably could have explained that better in the initial rollout,” he said. “Now the training has been overwhelmingly endorsed by the franchise community which is a big, big win.”

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Heissner had help learning to manage the new program as well. MindLeaders provided an all day training session on administering the courses via **MindLeaders Central**. MindLeaders also imported the initial set of students into the system and put them in groups based on market. Since then Heissner has been doing his own administration, with MindLeaders providing reporting support as needed. "We've had lots of changes with turnover, restaurants closing or changing hands," said Heissner. "But the administration has been easy and I've had good support in making any needed changes."

Creating Results

MindLeaders training has created exceptional results within Church's food safety training program. Heissner estimates that **Church's is saving 75% of its previous food safety training costs** when both hard and soft costs are considered. And the cost savings aren't the only benefit. **Employees like the training and the passage rate on exams has improved.** "I can be 80% assured that an employee will pass their exam and get certified," said Heissner. "We didn't have that before. It was absolutely an unknown." In fact the program has enjoyed so much success that Heissner's counterpart in international is using MindLeaders training for their needs as well.

"MindLeaders was the 'hands down' choice," said Parrish. "Feature for feature, they offered the best value." Heissner agrees. "I would recommend MindLeaders food safety training without qualification. I will say that they weren't the cheapest provider we looked at, but they certainly delivered the best value. Our intent is to continue with the program."

About MindLeaders

MindLeaders is a learning company. We have over 27 years of experience designing elearning programs that promote the success of people and companies. Our courses cover topics from software skills to leadership, from workplace and food safety to programming and network administration. We have over 1,000 clients in more than 30 countries in the commercial, government, and education sectors. MindLeaders, located in Dublin, Ohio, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of ThirdForce PLC, headquartered in Dublin, Ireland. To learn more, or for a complete list of courses, call MindLeaders at **1-800-223-3732** or visit **mindleaders.com**.

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