

Customized Storage Keeps Back-of-House Space Organized

With nearly 6,000 restaurants in the United States and around the world, Taco Bell needed a partner to manage its back-of-the-house storage space. They found that partner when Leggett & Platt's Storage Products Group (International Storage Solutions) stepped in to design customized shelving and work stations. This 15-year business partnership is so successful that in 2001 Taco Bell named Leggett & Platt its Top Equipment Supplier of the Year, and since 1999, the company has been the key supplier for Taco Bell/Pizza Hut Express expansions. Leggett & Platt also provides value-engineering services throughout Yum! Brands Inc. and works on projects for KFC, Long John Silver's and A&W Restaurants as well.

A Strong Partnership

"Partnering with Leggett & Platt provides numerous benefits," says Rick Winfree, senior director of engineering, Taco Bell Corp. "Our partner is always aware of our current and future needs."

Leggett & Platt has outfitted new buildings and retrofitted older buildings for the chain. Taco Bell has eight to 10 different restaurant designs, so it requires the same number of back-of-the-house storage designs as well.

Winfree's goal is to have all the products come in the kitchen and move seamlessly toward customers in the front. It's important to streamline that flow so food preparation can be organized into logical work areas. He also wants enough storage flexibility for menu changes.

In 2001, the chain had a major rollout introducing a Big

Bell Value Menu with multiple products at all its locations. Engineers from Leggett & Platt's Storage Products Group developed work stations with custom tops to organize fry baskets, tongs and timers.

Currently, Leggett & Platt is working on drive-thru Speed of Service Kits, developing a product line that enables Taco Bell to improve organization at the drive-thru window so it can process orders faster and service more customers in a shorter period of time.

How a Good Partnership Works

"We provide customized solutions to meet our partners' individual needs. We do so by offering an endless supply of integrated ideas and solutions to help improve storage optimization backed by our diversified product lines and unmatched experience," says Ron Murray, senior vice president of Global Business Development, Leggett & Platt's Storage Products Group.

To customize a designated space, Taco Bell provides a list of every individual package it uses and determines where these packages need to be placed to enhance speed and employee convenience. Then Leggett & Platt figures in inventory, delivery frequency and projected sales volume to customize and manufacture the storage units.

As an ideal partner, Leggett & Platt supports Taco Bell's goals by having a sales representative work directly with the company. The representative is supported by project managers and engineers, resulting in an integrated approach incorporating the strengths of multiple disciplines within the company. Leggett & Platt's can create wire shelving and work stations that optimize space. The project manager has the capabilities to develop products or system ideas and put them into a CAD format. Application-based engineers at the factory are supported by field project managers.

"One of the most important advantages to a partnership with Leggett & Platt's Storage Products Group is there is one source of contact for these products so we can get something changed or tested quicker to meet our new menu needs," says Winfree.



Leggett & Platt designed storage solutions for Taco Bell's different restaurant designs.



Work centers and condiment towers are options for customized storage.



Evolving Design Solutions

Steven Darnell, unit president, Leggett & Platt Storage Products Group, discusses creative options in custom storage.

Q: What unique benefits does your company provide for foodservice?

A: From an operational perspective, we help our customers reach their goals whether they are purchasing a product at a particular price point; increasing their speed of service; offering custom storage choices in stainless steel, aluminum- and epoxy-coated wire products; or providing a combination of materials for their back-of-the-house storage needs. Rarely can a provider supply all these solutions for the food-prep and storage areas.

Q: How does your company remain flexible and current in the face of constantly changing menu applications?

A: Fast food casual dining is focusing on healthier food selections. As a result, restaurants are using fresher products

and need shelf space for them, and they need to efficiently move products from the freezer to the thawing area to the food-prep area. We work with their engineers to provide the right solutions for what they are trying to accomplish.

Q: How quickly can your company customize storage systems for customers?

A: Besides providing products for the foodservice industry, we are a provider of storage systems for our industrial supply base. When a customer defines its parameters, our engineering staff and space planners can provide the product within 30 days.

Q: What new foodservice trends do you see in the coming years?

A: Foodservice operators are considering cordless, portable appliances.

We are trying to determine where this electrical appliance can be placed in the food prep and serving areas, and plan to work with electronics companies to try and make this feasible.

Q: What does the future hold?

A: Our objective is to create new products for our customers whose footprints are becoming smaller. For example, our FreeStyle System is a versatile upright structure that offers multiple sizes and components to accommodate a variety of applications in a work area. The FreeStyle System can be configured for drive-thru, prep stations or basic storage.

Besides developing creative products, we see exciting opportunities in the foodservice industry in Western Pacific and European markets.