

# 5 Ways Managed Network Services Can Help Restaurant Franchises Grow

The number of franchise restaurants has grown rapidly in recent years, often due to the very nature of the franchise business model itself: Distributed locations, run by people with entrepreneurial minds and backed by a strong corporate brand. This has proven to be a very scalable model for growth. Yet that distributed model for growth can also be a challenge to providing unified customer experiences and achieving brand standards, especially when it comes to the technology that supports the modern restaurant environment.

Restaurant franchisees increasingly rely on information technology to run their day-to-day businesses and serve their customers, so much so that standardized digital experiences are becoming as important as standardized ingredients and menus for some brands.

Of course, individual franchisees are limited when it comes to executing a corporate IT strategy because they may lack the right network equipment, software, personnel, budget and/or critical expertise," says Marybeth

Pearce, Senior Director, Food & Beverage, Enterprise Solutions at Comcast Business. "That's where franchisors play a vital role in supporting key business initiatives at the corporate and franchisee levels with modernized networking infrastructure and services. Network performance, analytics capabilities, management of Capex and Opex expenditures, security, and ensuring a superior customer experience all demand systems and applications that are accessed via high-speed networks. And those networks are becoming more complex to manage as a restaurant brand's number of locations grows."

Rather than hiring a lot of in-house network professionals or taking on huge Capex expenditures, many restaurant franchisors are turning to managed network service providers to help support franchisee technology needs across the board. The economic and operational benefits of managed network services are substantial, and the industry is recognizing offloading some network management obligations can actually accelerate business.

Managed network services such as internet, WiFi, security, business continuity/failover, routing, voice, unified communications and a range of other services, support and deployment functions are among the key capabilities that managed network services can fulfill, freeing up franchisees to do what they do best—serve their patrons.

This report looks at five ways that managed network services can help restaurant franchises grow.

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## 1 Rolling out networking solutions at scale

Let's say your restaurant chain wants to improve customer drive-through efficiency, because long lines at your drive-through window are likely to cause customers to abandon the line and seek service elsewhere. Much of the solution to deliver such efficiency is going to be technology-driven, implemented over a high-speed network that help franchises process, fulfill and record transactions much faster.

"Having local franchisees handle the task of identifying the technology that will deliver these efficiencies and then managing the deployment of the technology will have limited success," says Pearce. "The ultimate goal should be to implement these improvements across your full franchise organization at the same time. Reducing drive-through times by just one minute across an entire portfolio of restaurants demands a reliable, resilient and high-speed network, managed and supported by an experienced service provider. The same thing is true for the rollout of other services across franchises, like in-store self-service kiosks, customer WiFi services or mobile ordering and fulfillment. Those and other solutions all take place over local- and wide-area network connections, and rolling them out piecemeal could lead to inconsistent application performance and bumpy customer experiences."



Choosing a technology partner that can deploy the selected solutions at scale across your entire brand is critical to maintaining a consistent experience for your franchisees and customers. In addition to maintaining consistency, it will allow your brand to realize financial return on investment and other operational benefits sooner.

## 2 Setting brand standards for technology requirements and customer experience

Just as corporate executives at a restaurant company do not let their individual stores choose their own food ingredients or create their own signage and logos, franchisees need to follow well-established brand standards for hardware, software and technology services. Establishing network technology brand standards ensures each individual location has the foundation needed to run applications and initiatives being rolled out now or explored for the future. It also ensures a consistent experience for your franchisees to run their business.

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Using an experienced network managed service provider ensures that applications and services that go out over the network look and behave the way they were designed to back at headquarters. Working with a managed network service provider helps simplify the technology essential to franchisees running their businesses, keeping costs under control and monitoring system-wide network behavior that could lead to down time or spotty performance that could impact your diners' experience. With a consistent set of technology standards deployed across an entire brand system, your managed network service partner can quickly identify and react to service-impacting issues no matter the location or owner of the store.

Consider, for instance, what might happen if a corporate network didn't have proper bandwidth standards. A human resources training application might not be able to be rolled out across all stores—only those stores that had certain bandwidth tiers could actually stream the training, while others would be stuck buffering.

## 3 Alleviating complex technology vendor management

Many franchisees do not have the time, money, experience or staff to manage potentially dozens of different vendors for networking equipment, other IT hardware, applications software, security tools and more. Restaurants have long known this, which is why corporate offices typically take on the vendor management task for franchises for everything from food and restaurant supplies to business services like negotiating rent and building maintenance. Using a single, experienced and reputable managed service provider frees up franchisees from negotiating purchase agreements, establishing service-level agreements or putting in place a reasonable technology-refreshment plan.

This is extremely important, as it allows franchisees to focus on their customers and their core business, which is to provide a superior guest experience

and quality food, says Pearce. “Leveraging the experience and scale of a large managed services partner provides you with the assurance that your franchisees will be well supported, and the partner will own the end-to-end network experience so your franchisees can focus on their guests.” It also helps reduce the frequency of site visits or calls to the store, which takes employees away from running the restaurant. Leveraging a partner that can provide the best-of-breed technology needed to run the restaurant allows for consolidated visits to install, maintain and troubleshoot the multiple network components critical to running the restaurant.

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## **4 Heading off damaging cybersecurity breaches and ensuring compliance**

Because of the large customer bases and widespread use of credit cards, debit cards and loyalty programs, restaurants are prime targets for cyberthieves. Unfortunately, high-visibility data breaches have hit restaurant franchises in every corner of the retail food service industry. Individual franchisees simply don’t have the ability, time or money to track new threats, remediate problems and thoroughly defend their businesses against cyberattacks. Working with a managed network service provider to deploy a multi-layered security defense is essential. Franchisors need to take a holistic view across their full network of restaurants in order to more reliably and efficiently identify anomalies, ensure updated security versions and monitor potentially suspicious activity on a wide scale. Using a managed service partner helps achieve those goals in an efficient, scalable manner.

Compliance is a complex, ever-shifting and demanding requirement for restaurant brands and their franchises. From big compliance initiatives such as PCI-DSS to a confusing maze of local, state and federal guidelines on food handling safety, food service temperature and labor rates, massive amounts of data must be captured and shared with corporate offices for reports and audits. Managed network services based on a robust, scalable network that supports collecting and transmitting data significantly eases a franchisor’s burden of compliance and data governance.



## 5 Quickly resolving network problems that impact the business

Network downtime is a big problem in any industry. But in the restaurant business, a faulty or unavailable network presents a host of problems ranging from cashiers having to wait to ring up customers to mobile orders not being able to be placed. In other cases, your computer-controlled kitchen appliances may run into temperature control problems or a real-time inventory management system might not have network access to a corporate ordering database.

“The impact of downtime becomes particularly problematic with the emergence of new purchasing channels for restaurants,” says Pearce. “In many instances, downtime no longer can be temporarily overcome by handling and batching transactions on a cash-only basis.”

Regardless of the problem, the result is the same: lower sales and profits, reduced employee productivity and very frustrated customers. Whatever the issue—security problems, network latency issues, lack of connectivity to cloud-based applications, and so on—franchisees need problems detected and remediated immediately, and that is an essential role for managed network service providers.



## Selecting the right managed network services partner

When looking for the right partner to provide managed networking services for franchisees, restaurants need to look for some fundamental traits and abilities. These include:

- **The ability to deploy at scale.** Whether through organic growth or strategic acquisitions, size and scale are often the name of the game for successful restaurateurs. Pick a partner that can grow with your organization and ensure that your brand is supported with great technology and services.
- **Consistent and fast deployment of systems.** If your rollout takes a week in your flagship New York restaurant but a month in Los Angeles, you're going to have inconsistent data flows and more than likely will run into data anomalies across your network. Just like you want a consistent customer experience for every diner, you want to have a consistent rollout for your systems.
- **Security services that align with the corporate organization's critical initiatives.** Solutions for individual restaurants need to be vetted by security professionals working in concert with the headquarters team. Service providers must keep in mind that even a seemingly appropriate security tool for an individual restaurant's network needs to be part of the "greater good" of overall network security.
- **A solutions architecture team that vets how the network is deployed, managed, upgraded and scaled over time.** It's important to work with a provider that takes a strategic, long-term approach to all forms of networking, from fixed to mobile and from local to wide-area.

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