

Web-based programs take the pain out of shift scheduling

By DINA BERTA

WASHINGTON (July 21, 2008) —When server Anne Lettieri needs to know the weekly schedule for her shifts at The Tombs restaurant here, she checks her e-mail, or she can opt to get the schedule in a text message on her cell phone. If she wants to add a shift at the casual-dining restaurant or swap with someone, she then can send out an e-mail or text message to her co-workers.



Some **Web-based** scheduling programs send shift information to employees by text messages.

“That’s a big advantage,” said Lettieri, who has been waitressing for the past year at the rathskeller-style eatery near Georgetown University, one of 13 establishments run by multiconcept operator [Clyde’s Restaurant Group](#).

Looking to improve the ease of scheduling for managers and to better connect with younger, techsavvy employees, more restaurants are trading in paper and pencil for **Web-based** scheduling programs, which can reduce the amount of time managers spend putting schedules together and increase employee satisfaction with their shift assignments.

Since making a switch to Schedulefly.com, a **Web-based** scheduling program, The Tombs’ executive manager, Ken Siegrist, has cut in half the time it took to schedule 100 employees.

The program also has eliminated arguments and confusion over shifts, he said.

“They are much happier,” Siegrist said. “You can’t image how more efficient this is.”

One of the leading causes of employee turnover in the industry is dissatisfaction with work schedules. In exit interviews with more than 2,300 hourly restaurant employees, 81 percent said scheduling was their primary reason for leaving and seeking another job, reported Goodwin & Associates, a Concord, N.J.-based human resources consulting firm.

Scheduling is also an issue for restaurant managers. Out of more than 1,600 exit interviews, 67 percent said their work hours and schedules were not realistically presented when they interviewed for the job, Goodwin found.

For managers, the main complaint was too many hours and too many weekend hours, according to the survey. Hourly employees, who were mostly front-of-the-house workers, complained they did not get enough shifts.

“Our data shows managers leave their positions in search of more flexible schedules, while hourly employees covet the night and weekend shifts,” said consultant Eric Goodwin.

Automating the scheduling process cuts down on human error and makes it easier for employees to change their shifts, said restaurant and human resources managers.

Irvine, Calif.-based [Claim Jumper](#) restaurants last year began rolling out a [Web-based](#) program, [HotSchedules.com](#), to its 45 stores in eight states, said Avery Block, people and brand manager.

“If an employee had a family emergency or last-minute vacation and needed to get a shift covered, he or she would have to go to the store, fill out the shift trade book and wait for someone to pick up their shift,” Block said. “Now it’s so much easier for employees.”

The [programs](#) create a home page for a restaurant. Employees get a password and login so they can submit their availability and learn their schedule for the week.

The systems give managers lists of who is available for what shifts so they can set the schedule. Most managers give employees a deadline by which to submit their shift requests. If employees decide to trade shifts, the manager gets a notice to approve or deny it.

Gone are the arguments about who agreed to work when, said Christine Fiorini, operations manager for the Partners II Pizza restaurant in Atlanta’s Peachtree City section, one of the four pizzerias in the area.

The program has cut her scheduling time in half, but she was skeptical when a representative from Raleigh, N.C.-based [Schedulefly.com](#) first approached her, Fiorini admitted. After employees learned about the program, they encouraged her to consider it for the restaurant.



The Tombs’ executive manager Ken Siegrist says [Schedulefly.com](#) has cut in half the time it takes to schedule 100 employees.

“This generation is so wired; it’s so easy for them,” she said of the high school and college students who work in the restaurant. “When I put a message on the bulletin board on the home page or e-mail or text them, I know they received it. I know 90 percent of them have a phone in their hand constantly.”

Today’s young workers are very Web-savvy, said Tyler Rullman, chief operating officer of Schedulefly.com, which also has integrated its service with social-networking sites, such as Facebook.com, so employees can check on their work schedules while they are on Facebook.com.

“This fits in with their way of living,” Rullman said.

Online scheduling, while not widespread, is becoming a popular management tool in the industry, operators said.

“I think it’s on everyone’s wish list,” Block said. “It’s a cost issue, a budget issue and time issue. You really have to have a team dedicated to the rollout. I think this is something you will see the number of users increase in the next year. It’s definitely an attraction, and it absolutely saves managers time.”