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Snapfinger Lets You Peer Inside the Restaurant — From Your Living Room

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Ordering from restaurants online can be a crapshoot. Sometimes you just don't know if the menu is up to date, if "30-45 minutes" is an accurate delivery time, or whether the food you've ordered is what will actually arrive at your door.

One app maker is aiming to better that ordering process — by allowing customers to see in real time when a restaurant is running out of food or changing the menu.

Snapfinger, an Atlanta-based start-up that powers the online and mobile ordering of nationwide chains like Subway, Outback, California Pizza Kitchen and Boston Market, is updating its service so that it can be fully integrated into point-of-sale computer systems in restaurants.

Thanks to a new version of the app that is meant to serve — get it? *serve*? — both the restaurant employees and the customer who's ordering the food from blocks away, the customer can now see menu changes and updates as the restaurant staff is entering them. So if there's a special on the menu that night, the at-home diner can see it just as the people dining inside the restaurant can — and when the special runs out, the online or mobile menu will reflect that, too.

"We've realized that point-of-sale integration is crucial. As mobile ordering into restaurants gains momentum, the whole customer experience is really going to be dependent on systems like these," Snapfinger's CEO Jim Garrett said. He added that it is Snapfinger's goal to be the "OpenTable of food ordering," citing the popular reservation-making service that factors in available tables in real time as reservations are being made. Snapfinger currently powers online and mobile ordering for about 12,000 restaurants in the U.S.

Version 4.0 of the app, which is free, runs on iOS and Android devices. It also includes a map that gives directions to takeout restaurants, along with mobile prepayment features and the ability to have digital receipts sent to users' iPhones and iPads.

While Snapfinger is spicing up its service — according to Garrett, it accounts for 70 percent of all U.S. restaurant-ordering applications — it still faces formidable competition from growing services like Seamless and GrubHub. Both sites have made acquisitions in recent months to expand their reach — Seamless bought MenuPages, which claims 35,000 menus in its database, while GrubHub acquired Dotmenu, which caters to college campus crowds and boosted GrubHub's menu database significantly.

Garrett pointed out that both of those services are focused mainly on local markets in various cities, while Snapfinger has a foothold in big, nationwide restaurant chains and also serves as a white-label app.

Still, in recognizing the growing importance of the local market, Garrett said Snapfinger also plans to try to get more local restaurants to use Snapfinger in the coming year.

Tagged with: food, GrubHub, Jim Garrett, menu, Mobile, online, ordering, restaurant, seamless, snapfinger

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