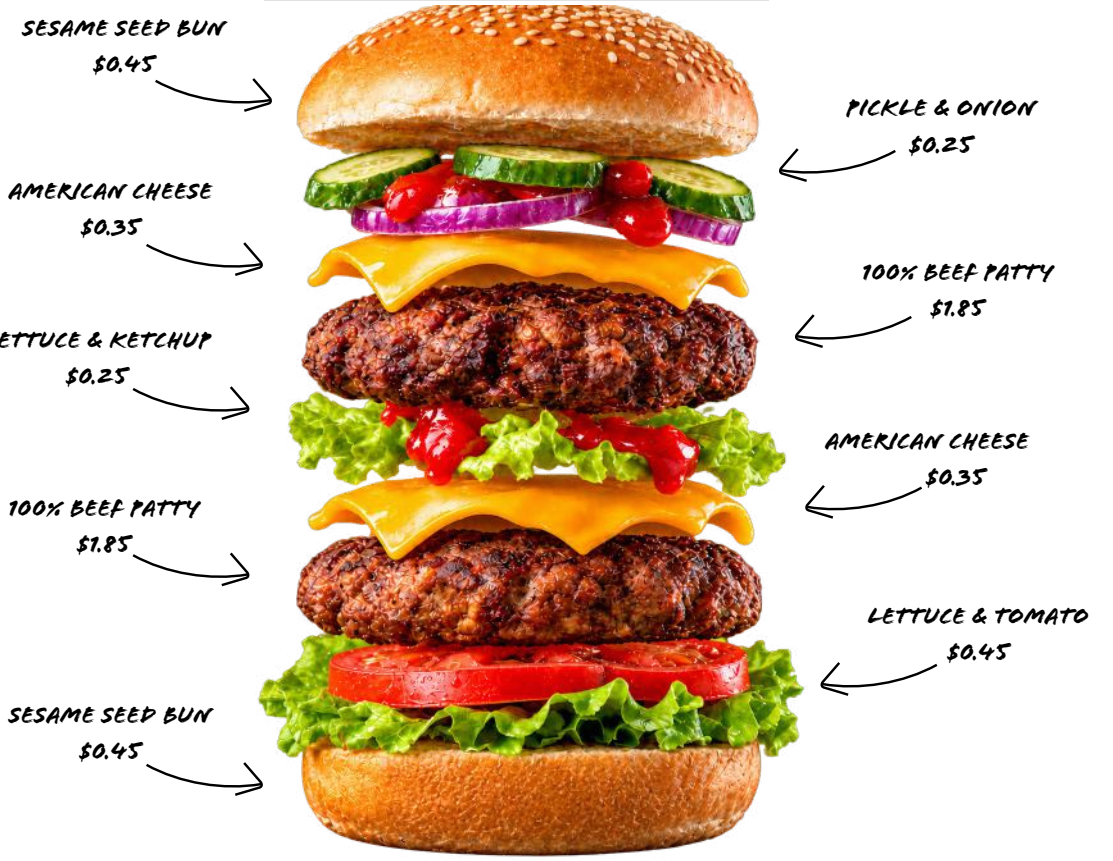
PRESENTED BY COBBLESTONE RESTAURANT SOLUTIONS

BEHIND THE TICKET

SOUTHERN INDIANA'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR INDEPENDENT RESTAURANTS & FOOD TRUCKS

NOVEMBER 2026 / ISSUE 03



EVERY PENNY COUNTS

Do you know what every order really costs?

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

COMMODITY OUTLOOK
Is your food cost going up or down in November?

BEHIND THE PLATE
What 6 Years Owning a Pizza Parlor Taught Dontae Hines

RESTAURANT TECHNOLOGY
Can an AI receptionist save you $1,500 a month?



Good ideas. Practical tools. All free.

Running a restaurant means making a hundred decisions a day. The Owner's Notebook brings together **200+ practical articles, step-by-step procedures and free downloadable worksheets** to help independent owners turn everyday challenges into a plan.

01

CONTROL YOUR COSTS

Explore food cost, inventory, recipe costing, menu pricing and labor. Find practical ways to understand your numbers.

02

BUILD BETTER ROUTINES

Get help with scheduling, daily operations and marketing. Turn useful ideas into procedures your team can follow.

03

PUT IT TO WORK

Read a guide. Download a worksheet. Use it in your restaurant. No paywall, paid VIP tier or upgrade charges.

EXPLORE YOUR FREE RESOURCE LIBRARY

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theownersnotebook.com

SCAN TO EXPLORE

INDEPENDENT OPERATOR COMMODITY OUTLOOK

BY JASON DICKEN | PROTEIN, PRODUCE, DAIRY & PANTRY PROCUREMENT AUDIT

CHOICE BEEF	JUMBO WINGS	PORK LOINS	SALAD GREENS	DRY POTATOES	BUTTERFAT
▲ +4.2%	▲ +2.8%	▼ -2.4%	▲ GAP SPIKE	▼ FAVORABLE	▲ Q4 PEAK

1. BEEF & CATTLE COMPLEX

▲ FIRM / ELEVATED

Choice Chuck & Rounds: ▲ +4.5% MoM
Cattle herd contraction keeps raw feeder prices tight; stew meat and pot roast cuts stay high.

Ground Beef 81/19 & Trim: • STABLE / FLAT
Imported blending trimmings provide ceiling; burger patty costs hold steady through mid-month.

Middle Cuts (Ribeye, Strip): ▲ HOLIDAY PEAK Corporate banquet bookings and holiday party bookings drive rib primals up 6–9%.

2. POULTRY & EGG COMPLEX

▲ SEASONAL SURGE

Bone-In Jumbo Wings: ▲ +3.1% MoM Intense football weekend volume and sports tavern demand keep fresh wing cases at premium tiers.

Boneless/Skinless Breasts: ▼ -1.8% EASING Plentiful freezer inventories give operators room for value sandwich features and tenders.

Shell Eggs (Large Grade A): • CONTROLLED Flock replenishment maintains stable case costs following late-summer adjustments.

3. PORK & SMOKEHOUSE

▼ FAVORABLE MARGINS

Pork Loins & Chops: ▼ -3.2% EASING Peak autumn hog slaughter volume ensures prime value for center-of-plate features.

Pork Bellies & Sliced Bacon: • STEADY / BALANCED Bacon pricing stabilizes after late-summer BLT runs; lock in 60-day distributor contracts.

Italian Sausage & Pizza Ham: ▼ -1.5% FAVORABLE
Excellent cross-utilization vehicle for strombolis, pasta bakes, and breakfast hashes.

4. GREENS & TRANSITION SALADS

▲ TRANSITION VOLATILE

Romaine Hearts & Leaf: ▲ +8% TO +14% GAP Salinas-to-Yuma field migration creates standard 3-week supply gap and freight price jumps.

Iceberg 24-Count Cartons: ▲ VOLATILE Watch for tip-burn and rib-blight during shipping handoff; enforce dock quality refusals.

Cucumbers & Bell Peppers: • IMPORT TRANSITION Domestic frost transitions supply to Florida field pack and Mexican shade-house arrivals.

5. HARVEST TUBERS, ALLIUMS & FRUIT

▼ BEST BUY INDEX

Russet Potatoes & Reds: ▼ -4.0% HARVEST LOW Northwest storage cellars are full; bulk 50-lb cartons deliver lowest plate cost of the year.

Yellow & Red Jumbo Onions:
▼ STEADY / LOW Excellent quality and cured skin conditions ensure zero storage rot on prep racks.

Apples, Cranberries & Citrus: ▼ EXPANDING SUPPLY New-crop Michigan/Washington apples and early California navel oranges lower dessert costs.

6. DAIRY, CHEESE & PANTRY

▲ SEASONAL PRESSURE

Block Butter & Heavy Cream: ▲ +5.1% HOLIDAY RUN Commercial holiday bakeries draw heavily on butterfat pools; anticipate firm spot prices.

Mozzarella & Cheddar Blocks: • CME RANGE-BOUND Cheese barrels remain balanced; pizza margins remain protected through contract pricing.

Canola Oil & High-Gluten Flour: • STEADY SUPPLY Global grain balances provide stable wholesale baseline for bakery and fryer operations.

OPERATOR PURCHASING BLUEPRINT •

PROTEIN RE-BALANCING: Build November features around bone-in pork chops and chicken thighs to offset tightening beef chuck costs.

NOVEMBER ACTION STEPS

SALAD PREP DEFENSE:
Order romaine 2–3 times weekly rather than large single drops to avoid spoilage losses during the Yuma transition.

STARCH MARGIN BOOST:
Maximize loaded potato chowders, smashed russets, and onion rings—tuber costs are at their 12-month low.

THE 3-MINUTE RECEIVING DOCK AUDIT (BEFORE SIGNING THE MANIFEST)

- **Random Box Weigh-In:** Weigh catch-weight poultry & beef cases to catch shorted billed weights.
- **Core Temp Leafy Greens:** Reject warm cartons (>41°F) to avoid absorbing field transition rot.
- **Line-Item Price Comparison:** Flag any invoice price increase exceeding 3% from your last delivery ticket.
- **Split-Case & Fuel Surcharges:** Audit hidden $3.50–$8.00 accessed delivery fees before signing.

STOP VENDOR LEAKS



SOURCES & MARKET REFERENCES: USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Fruit & Vegetable Shipping Point Reports; USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) Livestock, Dairy & Poultry Outlook (LDP); Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) Cash Butter & Cheese Settlement Data; Urner Barry Weekly Protein Indices; *The Owner's Notebook* (theownersnotebook.com).

Community First Flavor

From Busser to Business Owner

Dontae Hines brings experience, personality, and a commitment to community to his Evansville pizza parlor.

BY JASON DICKEN | OPERATOR NOTES & FIELD REVIEW

In an Evansville pizza market steeped in decades of tradition, standing out requires bold creativity, unapologetic portioning, and an uncompromising dedication to house-made dough.

Tucked into the Northside neighborhood at **6669 Kratzville Road**, **Dontae's Highland Pizza Parlor** has cemented its place as one of the area's most talked-about culinary operations. Combining nostalgic parlor vibes with imaginative flavor profiles, Dontae's proves what independent hospitality is all about.



The welcoming Northside neighborhood home of Dontae's on Kratzville Road.

SCRATCH DOUGH & CULT-FAVORITE CREATIONS

Dontae's Pizza: Feeding a Community, Building a Legacy

"I am just a fisherman trying to feed my community." Those words capture the heart of Dontae's Pizza and the purpose behind its owner's work. During our Behind the Ticket interview, Dontae spoke about the people he serves, the family that inspires him, and the responsibility he feels to make his restaurant a welcoming place. His idea of feeding a community extends beyond a meal. It includes giving people a place to connect, feel appreciated, and leave with a reason to return.

That purpose began with a family dream. Dontae's mother always wanted a pizza shop, and his own path into the restaurant business started at sixteen as a busboy. Once he made his way into the kitchen, he discovered an outlet for his creativity. Opening his own restaurant brought that experience and inspiration together, but doing so during the pandemic demanded perseverance. Rising costs and the work of building a dependable team tested him early. Through those challenges, he kept his attention on the people, the product, and the daily effort needed to serve his customers well.

The menu reflects his willingness to have fun in the kitchen. Alongside familiar favorites like deluxe and meat lovers pizzas, Dontae describes combinations that invite customers to try something different, including a pizza featuring apple butter, ham, bacon, and apples. His Clucking Pig sandwich brings together house-made creamy pesto, chicken, bacon, tomatoes, and onion. Each offers a glimpse of the imagination behind the menu and an owner who still finds joy in creating something to share.

His commitment to feeding the community is especially clear when he talks about inclusion. Dontae shared how he has welcomed groups from the autistic community into the restaurant to make pizzas and enjoy time with their families. He speaks affectionately about his employees and wants guests to feel comfortable and valued. He understands that people choose to spend their hard-earned money at his tables, and he wants to honor that choice with care and a lasting impression.

For Dontae, the restaurant is also a way to leave his children a legacy of courage, sacrifice, and possibility. He hopes that watching him pursue his dream will help them believe in their own. That same sense of purpose gives his words about being a fisherman their meaning: he is using the skills he has to provide for others. Dontae's Pizza carries that spirit into its food, its welcome, and its place in the neighborhood—one meal, one family, and one connection at a time.

Dontae's Highland Pizza Parlor
6669 Kratzville Road · Evansville, IN 47710
(812) 777-0016 · dontaespizzaparlor.com

Watch the full interview here



THE VERDICT: CRUST, CHEESE & STROMBOLI

We put Dontae's signature items to the test. Here is why this Northside destination commands lines of carryout orders every weekend.


House Specialty Pie


The Farva Stromboli


Sauced Jumbo Wings

1. **The Larr (Deluxe):** Notice the even bake from center to rim. Fresh banana peppers, crumbled Italian sausage, sautéed mushrooms, and melted provolone-mozzarella blend create an explosive bite with zero grease sag.
2. **The Farva Stromboli:** Evansville takes its stroms seriously, and Dontae's delivers an absolute heavyweight. Crumbled sausage, pepperoni, and sweet peppers stuffed inside a golden-toasted hoagie roll with stretch-to-ceiling cheese.
3. **Honey Buffalo Glazed Wings:** Crisped skin beneath a rich, sticky caramelization. A must-add pairing for game day carryout.

DONTAE'S CULINARY SCORECARD

Crust Snap & Texture:	🔥🔥🔥🔥	Sauce Balance:	🔥🔥🔥🔥
Topping Coverage:	🔥🔥🔥🔥	Stromboli Density:	🔥🔥🔥🔥
Sauce Acidity & Seasoning Balance:	🔥🔥🔥🔥	Portion-to-Price Value Index:	🔥🔥🔥🔥

"Dontae's represents the heart of Evansville comfort dining: big flavors, generous hands, and proud local grit. Skip the big chains and support an independent kitchen that gets it right."

6669 Kratzville Rd, Evansville, IN • Call: (812) 777-0016 • Order Online: www.dontaespizzaparlor.com

Dontae's proves that loading pizzas edge-to-edge doesn't mean losing margin. By relying on custom-shredded cheese blends and standardizing house sauce rings, they balance high-value presentation with tight kitchen yields.

KNOW YOUR TRUE COST: THE COMPLETE PLATE & PACKAGING GUIDE

BY JASON DICKEN | FOUNDER, COBBLESTONE POS

Ask most restaurant owners what a bacon cheeseburger costs to make, and they will quickly total the beef patty, bun, cheese, and bacon. But when you only cost out the core ingredients, you're missing up to **30% of your actual expense**.

Every to-go box, heavy-duty fork, foil wrap, portion cup, paper napkin, squeeze of mayo, and pinch of seasoned salt costs money. In an industry where net margins hover between 3% and 7%, neglecting these "invisible" packaging and prep costs is often the difference between a profitable shift and operating at a loss.

1. THE COMPLETE FOOD & PACKAGING FORMULA

To calculate your true margin, your recipe cost cards must combine raw food cost with total packaging and service overhead:



```
  Raw Food Ingredients (Proteins + Produce + Dairy + Buns)
+ Invisible Cooking Costs (Oil + Seasonings + Sauces + Garnishes)
+ Packaging & Paper Goods (To-Go Box + Bag + Cutlery + Napkins)
```

= TRUE TOTAL PLATE COST

True Food Cost % = (True Total Plate Cost ÷ Menu Retail Price) × 100

2. THE INVISIBLE LINE ITEMS MOST OPERATORS FORGET

When costing out a dish, always add a dedicated line item for these frequently overlooked items:

To-Go & Paper Goods

- Clamshell Containers ($0.22 - $0.45)
- Heavy-Duty Paper Bags ($0.12 - $0.28)
- Wrapped Cutlery Kits ($0.08 - $0.14)
- Dinner Napkins (2x = $0.04)

Cooking Oils & Seasonings

- Fryer Oil Absorption ($0.12 / order)
- Grill Butter / Pan Spray ($0.05 / order)
- House Spice Rub ($0.06 / portion)
- Dressing / Portion Cups ($0.09)





REALITY CHECK: A single takeout order carrying 3 condiment packets, 2 extra portion cups, a heavy plastic bag, and a handful of napkins adds nearly **$1.00 in non-food expenses** to your ticket!

THE OWNER'S WORKSHEET

WHAT DOES YOUR BEST SELLER REALLY COST? | HANDS-ON MARGIN AUDIT

TARGET ITEM TO AUDIT:	MENU CATEGORY:	TARGET FOOD COST %:	AUDIT DATE & COOK:
_____	_____	_____	_____

INSTRUCTIONS: Pick one popular takeout item. Use your current distributor invoices, weigh the raw and cooked portions, and calculate: **How Much Item × Cost of Item = Cost Per Order**. Count everything that leaves in the bag!

CATEGORY TO COUNT	SPECIFIC ITEM (WRITE IN)	HOW MUCH ITEM (PORTION)	COST OF ITEM (UNIT)	COST PER ORDER
Main Protein (patty, tenders, breast)	_____	_____ oz/ea	×$ _____	=$ _____
Bread, Bun, or Base (brioche, dough, rice)	_____	_____ ea/cut	×$ _____	=$ _____
Cheese and Toppings (cheddar, bacon)	_____	_____ sl/oz	×$ _____	=$ _____
Sides (fries, chips, slaw, rings)	_____	_____ oz/bag	×$ _____	=$ _____
Sauces, Seasonings & Oil (fry oil, dips)	_____	_____ fl oz	×$ _____	=$ _____
Container and Lid (clamshell, box, bowl)	_____	_____ pcs	×$ _____	=$ _____
Portion Cups and Lids (2 oz / 4 oz sides)	_____	_____ sets	×$ _____	=$ _____
Bag, Napkins, Cutlery Kit (kraft bag, fork)	_____	_____ kit/pk	×$ _____	=$ _____
Other (tamper tape, foil wrap, insert)	_____	_____ units	×$ _____	=$ _____
TOTAL FOOD AND PACKAGING COST (ADD ALL ROWS)				= $ _____

1. MENU PRICE	2. TRUE COST %	3. CONTRIBUTION PROFIT
Current Price: $_____	Cost ÷ Price × 100: _____%	Left for Labor & Profit: $_____

WHAT DID YOU FIND THAT YOU WEREN'T COUNTING?

PRODUCE YIELDS • EXTRA CUPS • BAG COST

_____

_____

_____

THE COST CREEP FORMULA: If uncounted packaging and extra sauce add just **$0.85** per takeout order, a restaurant serving 30 takeout tickets a day leaks **$25.50 daily**—which adds up to **$9,307.50 a year** in vanished profit.

THE FIVE-MINUTE TEAM HUDDLE: "PACK IT RIGHT, EVERY TIME"

PRE-SHIFT TRAINING CARD

"Every guest should receive a complete order. Today we're agreeing on what belongs in each bag so we stop guessing."

Pick one common takeout order: Select your top-selling burger combo, specialty pie, wings, or family meal.

Have a team member pack it: Ask a line cook or expediter to pack as they normally do without coaching.

Check everything together: Inspect the food, sauces, containers, napkins, and utensils on the prep table.

Agree on a packing standard: Define the required quantities and explain how to charge for extra sauces.

POSTED PACKING STANDARD: List the included napkins, utensils, and sauces. Clearly show any charges for extras.

Post the standard at the station: Hang the packing checklist where every shift can see and follow it.



OUR PACKING STANDARD FOR THIS ORDER: EXPEDITER STATION SPECIFICATION

_____ Sauces ____ Napkins ____ Utensil Kits ____ Containers

"The point is consistency while still giving customers what they need—never stingy, never sloppy."

MEASURE & MASTER: CLOSING THE TRUE COST LOOP

WEEKLY TRACKING LOG

1. Spot-check
3 random carryout bags on Friday night expo before customer handoff.

2. EXTRA SAUCES
Ensure your POS has an active **+$0.75** modifier button for extra ramekins.

3. INVENTORY
Compare paper supply orders to ticket volume.

4. TEAM REPEAT
Rotate the 5-minute huddle weekly for salad bowls, wings, and catering trays.

ITEM AUDITED	PACKING VARIANCE CAUGHT	ACTION TAKEN	COMPLIANCE
_____	_____	_____	[ ] PASS [ ] RETRAIN
_____	_____	_____	[ ] PASS [ ] RETRAIN
_____	_____	_____	[ ] PASS [ ] RETRAIN
_____	_____	_____	[ ] PASS [ ] RETRAIN

THE COST CREEP FORMULA: If uncounted packaging and extra sauce add just **$0.85** per takeout order, a restaurant serving 30 takeout tickets a day leaks **$25.50 daily**—which adds up to **$9,307.50 a year** in vanished profit.

COBBLESTONE POS: REAL-TIME FOOD COST CALCULATOR BUILT RIGHT IN. Stop guessing your plate margins. Track recipe costs, packaging specs, and menu profitability automatically with every ticket rung up. Call **812-205-3322** or visit **CobblestonePOS.com**.

SEE A FREE DEMO

3. CASE STUDY: THE $3.50 ILLUSION VS $6.21 REALITY

Below is an actual cost comparison of a standard BBQ Pulled Pork Combo Meal when accounting for full packaging, condiments, and cooking loss:

ITEM DESCRIPTION	STANDARD COSTING	COMPLETE TRUE COSTING
8oz Smoked Pulled Pork (Raw vs Yield)	$1.80	$2.40 *(after 25% shrink)*
Brioche Bun & BBQ Sauce	$0.55	$0.65 *(includes extra sauce)*
5oz Potato Wedges / Fries	$0.65	$0.65
Fryer Oil & Seasoning Salt	$0.00 *(Forgotten)*	$0.14
3oz Creamy Coleslaw Side	$0.50	$0.50
Portion Cup & Lid (for Coleslaw)	$0.00 *(Forgotten)*	$0.09
Heavy 3-Comp Hinged Container	$0.00 *(Forgotten)*	$0.38
Cutlery Kit, Napkins & Heavy Bag	$0.00 *(Forgotten)*	$0.24
2x Ketchup / Hot Sauce Packets	$0.00 *(Forgotten)*	$0.16
Direct Labor — 4 minutes at $15/hour	$0.00 *(Forgotten)*	$1.00
TOTAL COST / MENU PRICE ($14.00)	**$3.50 (25.0% Cost)**	**$6.21 (44.4% Cost)**



A $2.71 DIFFERENCE PER TICKET = $2,710 PER MONTH!

Based on 1,000 takeout orders monthly. Including yield loss, sauces, oil, packaging, and direct labor raises the cost percentage from 25.0% to 44.4%

4. FIVE WAYS TO REDUCE FOOD & PACKAGING COSTS

1. **Audit Takeout Extra Habits:** Stop automatically dropping large handfuls of napkins, silverware kits, and sauce packets into every bag. Ask customers: *"Do you need cutlery or extra sauces with your order?"*
2. **Standardize Portion Scoops & Scales:**
   A cook over-portioning shredded cheese by 1 ounce on a busy line can cost your kitchen over $400 every month in unaccounted food usage.
3. **Perform Raw-to-Cooked Yield Tests:**
   Meats shrink 20%–35% during cooking. If you cost raw brisket at $5/lb, your actual cooked meat cost is closer to $7.20/lb.
4. **Re-Evaluate Container Styles:**
   Switching from heavy molded plastic to high-quality vented paperboard clamshells can save $0.15 per container while keeping fried foods crisper.
5. **Employee Training**
   Train every employee to pack each order consistently. Post a simple checklist at each station showing the required containers, sauces, napkins, and utensils.

ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAY: Cost out your top 5 best-selling takeout dishes this week using a scale and counting every paper item. Adjust menu prices or portion tools accordingly to lock in profits!

HOLIDAY REVENUE & OPERATIONS PLAYBOOK: 5 ACTION BOXES

TURN SEASONAL RUSH INTO BANKABLE PROFIT WITH DISCIPLINED PREP, UPFRONT CASH FLOW, AND CREW DEFENSE



BOX 01: THE 6-WEEK CORPORATE CATERING RUNWAY

50% NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT

HOW TO DO IT: Pitch a streamlined 3-tier hot buffet (protein, hearty potato/grain, seasonal veg) to medical offices, law firms, and banks by early November. Require a 50% non-refundable deposit to lock in calendar slots.

WHY IT WORKS: Captures corporate entertainment budgets before competitors start marketing. Secures operating cash upfront and locks in exact ordering volume weeks before holiday prep begins.

BOX 02: THE "BUY $50, GET $10" GIFT CARD MULTIPLIER

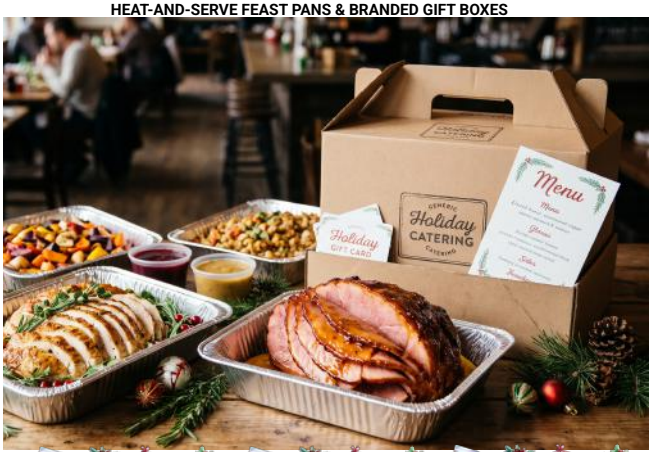
Q4 CASH & Q1 FOOT TRAFFIC

HOW TO DO IT: Set up a dedicated festive gift card display right at the host stand and register. Offer a $10 bonus voucher for every $50 bought, but restrict bonus redemption strictly to *Jan 2 – Feb 15*.

WHY IT WORKS: Front-loads interest-free cash into your bank account in December, while driving guests into your seats during winter's slowest dining weeks (where guests outspend the voucher by 2.5x).

Make holiday hosting easier with ready-to-serve family meals—and give guests a reason to return with restaurant gift cards.

HEAT-AND-SERVE FEAST PANS & BRANDED GIFT BOXES



BOX 03: TAKE-HOME FEAST PANS

OFF-PREMISE CAPACITY

HOW TO DO IT: Pre-sell chilled pans of roasted turkey, glazed ham, and sides with reheating cards for pickup on Thanksgiving Eve or Dec 23–24.

WHY IT WORKS: Batch-prepped during slow morning hours. Generates thousands in bonus revenue without tying up dining tables or fryers during service.

BOX 04: CREW DEFENSE & MORALE

CALL-OUT DEFENSE

HOW TO DO IT: Post holiday rosters 3 weeks early. Host hot pre-shift family meals and offer a $100 shift bonus pool for stations with zero call-outs.

BOX 05: DESSERT & DRINK ADD-ONS

+18% CHECK AVERAGE

HOW TO DO IT: Train staff to ask: *"Need gallons of spiced cider, tea, or whole holiday pies?"* Liquids and whole desserts carry 75%+ margins.

COBBLESTONE POS: DIGITAL CATERING INVOICING & GIFT CARD ENGINE
Collect catering deposits online, issue physical/digital e-gift cards with $0 monthly fees, and track kitchen prep sheets.
DEMO: 812-205-3322

UNCONVENTIONAL GUERRILLA MARKETING

Bootstrap tactics that generate buzz, spark conversations, and win local fans—all on a shoestring budget.

01 THE OVERSIZED WALKING SIGN (Guerilla)

Make an oversized cardboard version of your signature item (a giant burger, pizza slice, or taco). Hand-letter a simple message: "Lunch is just 2 blocks away" with your logo. Have an energetic team member wear or carry it through high-foot-traffic office or shopping areas just before the rush hour. It's impossible to ignore and turns a cheap prop into a walking conversation starter.



02 REVERSE GRAFFITI (FREE)

Using a custom-cut stencil of your logo and website, use a power washer to clean dirty, high-traffic public sidewalks. It leaves behind an eye-catching, highly visible message by simply "cleaning away the grime" on approved spaces. It is environmentally friendly, extremely cheap, and gets people looking down.

03 COMMUNITY FIRST SAMPLE DROPS (CHEAP)

Pack up several batches of fresh, warm bites or treats and physically carry them into nearby banks, retail shops, salons, and offices. Don't do a hard sales pitch—just drop them off with a friendly face and cards saying, "Compliments of the kitchen to our neighbors down the street!" This builds instant local ambassadors.

04 STREET CHALK ART (FREE TO CHEAP)

For less than $10, cover public sidewalks leading toward your entrance with colorful, custom hand-drawn chalk art, arrows, and playful messages. Draw faux footprints that lead people directly to your door, or create a selfie-friendly "interactive spot" on the pavement to trigger organic local social tags.

05 THE CO-MARKETING PARTNER EXCHANGE (FREE)

Partner with non-competing businesses (like the local barbershop, gym, or hardware store). Put your flyers, "comeback cards", or exclusive perks at their register, and feature their services at yours. Give their employees a neighborhood discount to drive easy word-of-mouth.

06 THE SECRET TREASURE HUNT (FREE)

Hide 3 to 5 "Golden Vouchers" (printed on yellow cards for a free meal) in public spots around your neighborhood —like parks, libraries, or community notice boards. Drop cryptic, playful photo clues on your social media. It creates highly engaging online buzz and encourages locals to explore the

07 THE FLASH MOB MOBILIZATION (FREE)

Coordinate with a local dance troupe, high school team, or volunteer group to staging a surprise, upbeat 5-minute performance or community gathering in a public square or just outside your patio during peak times. Ensure they wear branded shirts and distribute menu cards afterward.

COBBLESTONE
RESTAURANT SOLUTIONS
POS • PAYMENTS • LOYALTY • MARKETING

Cobblestone is more than a POS. It's a smarter way to run your restaurant.

Meet Daisy.

Your 24/7 AI Receptionist.

Tired of employees stopping what they're doing to answer the phone?

Daisy answers the phone, takes orders, and handles common customer questions so your staff can stay focused on the guests in front of them. No more stopping what you're doing every time the phone rings.

From order taking and hours questions to menu details and basic customer support, Daisy works around the clock to help your restaurant run smoother.

- Answers calls 24/7
- Takes phone orders automatically
- Answers common customer questions
- Frees up employees to focus on service
- Can save $1,500+ per month in labor



Save $1,500+
per month in labor

Not just a POS. *A partner.*

Ask what Daisy can do for your restaurant.

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Daisy
by Cobblestone

cobblestonepos.com

THE NO-RING BOTTLENECK: WHY VOICE AI IS THE OPERATOR'S NEW BEST HIRE

BY JASON DICKEN | FIELD GUIDE TO PHONE AUTOMATION & MARGIN RECOVERY

Every independent operator knows the sound of a Friday dinner rush: expo tickets printing, fryers sizzling, guests walking through the entryway, and the front telephone ringing relentlessly on the counter.

When your front counter or waitstaff gets pulled into a four-minute phone order with questions like *"What soups do you have today?"* or reading off credit card digits digit by digit, two costly things happen: your in-store dining room service slows down, and the next two callers get a busy signal and order from your competitor instead.



Conversational Voice AI captures phone orders on ring two, freeing staff for dining guests.

WHAT IS A VOICE AI RECEPTIONIST (AND HOW DOES IT WORK)?

Modern Voice AI is not the irritating "Press 1 for hours, Press 2 for takeout" phone tree of the 1990s. It is an intelligent, real-time conversational agent trained directly on your live POS menu, modifier matrix, inventory pars, and kitchen hours.

Natural Speech & Complex Customizations: Callers order just like they would with a veteran cashier (*"Give me a 14-inch thin crust, half pepperoni and jalapeño, light on the sauce, and well-done"*). The assistant can collect supported customizations. Allergy concerns and requests it cannot resolve should be referred to restaurant staff.

Direct POS & Kitchen Display Integration: Orders bypass handwriting and manual terminal punch-in. Once confirmed, the ticket fires straight to your KDS or kitchen printer with precise order timestamps.

Secure Payment by Voice or SMS Text Link: The assistant can securely tokenize card details over encrypted phone lines or text the guest a 1-tap checkout link while they remain on the line.

THE FINANCIAL MATH: HOW VOICE AI SAVES REAL CASH

FEWER MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Answering more calls gives more guests a chance to place an order. Track completed orders to see how many additional sales the service produces.

Illustrative example: Four additional orders per day at a $32 average ticket would generate $3,840 in sales over 30 operating days, before food, labor, service fees, and other expenses.

MORE CONSISTENT ADD-ON OFFERS

Configure relevant suggestions, such as a drink with a sandwich or a side with a family meal. Measure how often guests accept them and whether they improve contribution dollars.

CLEARER ORDER CONFIRMATION

Having callers review their items and modifiers can help catch mistakes before an order reaches the kitchen. Check tickets regularly and give guests an easy way to request help.

MORE TIME FOR IN-PERSON SERVICE

Handling routine calls can reduce interruptions at the counter. Use the time for greeting guests, checking orders, and keeping service moving. Payroll savings depend on whether paid hours actually decrease.

OPERATOR VERDICT: Voice AI doesn't replace hospitality—it restores it. When your front-of-house team isn't handcuffed to a ringing receiver, they make eye contact, greet entering guests, and deliver the personal service that keeps customers coming back.



LINE RIDDLE & CASE FILE

JOKE #01

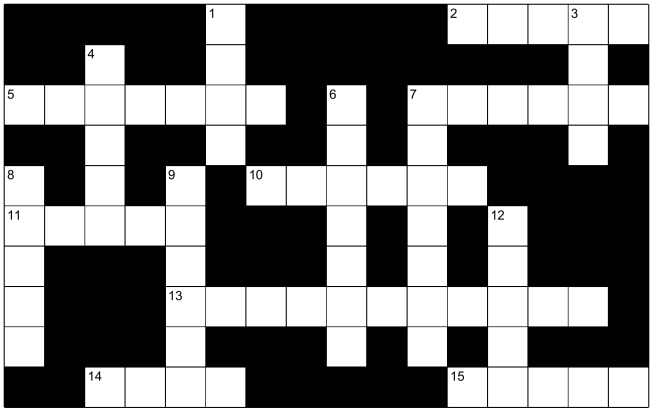
Q: What do you call a fake noodle sneaking through prep without a portion scale? **A:** *An impasta! Case closed: the marinara sauce was never weighed.*



BAR & EXPO HUMOR

JOKE #02

Q: What did the expeditor say to the bitter citrus wedge on the drink rail? **A:** *"Quit being sour—it's a 45-minute ticket board, not your peel!"*



ACROSS

2. Soup and sauce base
5. Finishing touch on a dish
7. Takes your order
10. Clears and resets tables
11. Cook's protective garment
13. Advance table booking
14. Advance kitchen work
15. Dish for serving a meal

DOWN

1. Greets and seats guests
3. Head of the kitchen
4. Request for food
6. Sweet final course
7. Dish featured for the day
8. Where guests dine
9. Main course, in the U.S.
12. Cook over direct heat



BACK OF THE HOUSE

A FEW THOUGHTS FROM JASON



NOVEMBER 2026 • FROM ONE OPERATOR TO ANOTHER

I've been thinking about what we're really building in this business. We spend so much time getting through the next rush, covering the next shift, and figuring out the next bill that we rarely stop long enough to see it. Then a conversation reminds you why you started. For me, it comes back to people—the family we're trying to provide for, the employees depending on us, and the community that keeps walking through our doors.

If you're heading into this holiday season feeling tired, I understand. You can love this business and still need a minute to catch your breath. You can be proud of what you've built and still wonder how you're going to handle everything tomorrow. Give yourself some grace. Think about everything you've learned, the hard days you've worked through, and the people who have helped you get here. There is a lot to be proud of, even when you're too busy to notice it.

I hope the people who help us build our dreams know there's room for their dreams, too.

That's something I want us to carry into the holidays. Take a minute to ask your employees how they're doing, and give them time to answer. Learn what they're looking forward to and what they might be struggling with. Sometimes we get so used to counting on someone that we forget to tell them how much they matter. A sincere thank-you, a little patience, or doing your best to get someone home for an important family moment can stay with them long after the shift ends.

And remember the people waiting for you at home. I know how easy it is to say, "Once things slow down, we'll spend more time together." I've said it myself. But there will always be another order, another repair, another reason to stay. Make a little time now. Sit down for a meal. Call someone you've been meaning to call. Let your kids tell you about their day without checking your phone. The people you're working so hard for need to feel your presence along the way.

My hope for you this season is that you keep chasing what matters to you and recognize the good you're already doing. You're teaching someone what perseverance looks like. You're giving someone an opportunity. You're creating a place where people can gather and feel welcome. Keep going, take care of your people, and let them take care of you sometimes, too. I hope you find a few quiet moments this holiday season to enjoy the life you're working so hard to build.

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01

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02

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03

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