



Iconic Restaurant Franchise Gets Consistent and Cost-Effective Technology Rollouts



Siemon and Graybar Team up to Strategically Update Hundreds of Fast-Food Restaurants

According to the International Franchise Association, franchise unit growth has continued to increase despite today's economic headwinds, exceeding pre-pandemic levels in 2023. Nowhere is that growth more evident than within one of the nation's largest franchise operators that continues to expand its footprint across several iconic fast-food restaurant brands while keeping pace with the times through technology. However, quickly rolling out technology upgrades across thousands of locations that must provide a consistent brand experience takes a collaborative, strategic logistics approach and fast, easy, and seamless deployments backed by partners like Siemon and Graybar that share a common dedication to quality, performance, and customer service.



Supporting Fast-Food Tech

It is common for franchise units to change hands, especially over the past few years. Many smaller franchise operators struggled financially due to the pandemic and economic downturn, which opened up acquisition opportunities for larger franchise operators with greater liquidity to increase their units and expand their brand footprint. Several of the most recent significant franchise acquisitions are classified as either close to or in bankruptcy. However, the turnover of struggling franchise units also often comes with the need to remodel or upgrade older, neglected locations. Technology has become a key part of those upgrades.

Iconic fast-food restaurant franchises must provide patrons with consistent brand experiences, regardless of location. For many brands, achieving that experience now includes technology to drive efficiencies amidst labor shortages and keep pace with consumer demand for Wi-Fi, power outlets for charging devices, and personalized and contactless digital experiences through advanced e-commerce platforms like customer kiosks, mobile apps, and loyalty reward programs. Some well-known franchise brands use location tracking to digitally push out coupons and encourage orders from nearby customers. Others are testing artificial intelligence (AI) for robotic food prep, robot servers, drive-through chatbots, and customer voice recognition. One iconic brand is even looking at leveraging uniquely identifiable vehicle data to recognize and target specific drive-through customers.

When one of the nation's largest franchise operators acquired several hundred new fast-food restaurants, they found the technology infrastructure at several locations in complete disarray, with old category 3 and category 5 cabling, no standardized labeling, and random links that were difficult to trace. Not only were these locations experiencing many network failures, but there was also no way they could support the latest consumer- and operational-based technology required by the brand. This included a new POS system compliant with Payment Card Industry (PCI) requirements to segregate POS and credit card information on different networks, Wi-Fi, manager stations, make stations, kitchen display systems, customer carry-out monitors, phone systems, surveillance, and other technology-related requirements at each restaurant.

To tackle the network infrastructure upgrades for the newly acquired restaurants, the franchise operator needed to find the right technology and distribution partners capable of supporting hundreds of locations with efficient delivery and consistency. They also required high-quality components to ensure network performance and sought to develop a corporate-wide standard for all future technology rollouts. A collaborative partnership was born when the franchise operator met Jeff Nash, senior account manager for national distributor Graybar, and Lisa Shropshire, regional sales manager for Siemon, a leading provider of high-quality, high-performance IT infrastructure solutions.

Another key decision factor was the Siemon product offering. The franchise operator selected Siemon's UltraMAX® Category 6 cabling system for its future proofing throughput and modularity to enable seamless inventory and consistency from location to location. They especially appreciated the ability to mount the UltraMax outlets in either a flat or angled position and use only white patch cords with Siemon's removable color-coding clips, which reduced inventory and eased installation.

The Siemon UltraMAX copper connectivity system blends usability, quality, and performance within a single platform ideal for

Category 5e, 6, and 6A unshielded twisted-pair (UTP) deployments. As a common platform, UltraMax leverages Siemon's high degree of automation to reduce cost and ensure flexible capacity. The system includes UltraMAX outlets, patch panels, and termination tools designed to deliver maximum usability, quality, performance, and quick, reliable terminations. The outlets feature a unique linear lacing design that allows users to terminate from either side. All four pairs of the UTP cable can be terminated in one action using the UltraMAX 4-pair impact tool, delivering ultra-fast, consistent terminations.

“The way Graybar and Siemon took ownership and pride in delivering high-performance infrastructure solutions really brought to light their value. The fact that Siemon manufactures their components in the USA and offers a warranty on their systems were also huge decision factors.”

- Franchise Operator

Mastering the Whole Kit and Caboodle

The franchise operator chose to adopt a standardized upgrade model for the fast-food restaurants to achieve significant cost savings, consistency, and ease of deployment. The first step was to develop a specification with categories to support each location by analyzing infrastructure needs at each location. They reviewed all the existing equipment, usage data, and system requirements, discovering several locations using only half of their POS terminals. This allowed them to reduce the number of terminals required. They also considered peak volume times and drive-through locations.

Based on the developed specifications, Siemon and Graybar collaborated to present a project outline with kitted bills of materials. They established three different kits based on the number of POS terminals required at the various restaurant locations. Each kit includes subkits with UltraMax outlets, patch cords, and faceplates for POS terminals, make stations, manager stations, customer carry-out monitors, Wi-Fi access points, and other work area needs. The kits also include a rack subkit with two UltraMax patch panels, outlets, cable, color-coded clips, and a wall-mount frame to support the connectivity for each work area station. Graybar built and bagged each kit at their Cincinnati location to ensure quality and consistency, relying on dedicated inventory from Siemon to ensure fast delivery.

“We’re selling the kits directly to the franchise operator to coordinate all the deployments without deviating from the standard, ensuring consistent quality from one site to another. We chose to do this all in our Cincinnati location because it’s well-situated for delivery anywhere in the country. We even hired a dedicated project manager to oversee the process,” says Nash. “The dedicated inventory and support from Siemon is also a huge help — whenever we need anything, it ships to us immediately.”

While it took some time initially to perfect the kitting process, Graybar implemented multiple quality control measures to validate the contents of each kit and ensure clear labeling to eliminate any confusion for technicians on the job site. The kits accommodated upgrades at 20 to 30 fast-food restaurants weekly throughout 2023. “Everyone is challenged with inflation right now, and the kitting process with everything ready to deploy and sent from one location significantly reduced logistical costs and simplified installation for labor savings on the job,” says Nash. “We estimate that the kits alleviate 12 to 18% of installation time at each job site.”

Having set kits arrive on the job site facilitated standardization and reduced labor and errors by eliminating the need for installers to check and sort inventory for each station. According to the franchise operator, they would not have been able to upgrade the fast-food restaurants as quickly and seamlessly without kitting, and the amount of money and time saved was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. In addition to the kitting process, Siemon's Z-PLUG field-terminated plug contributed to the reduced CAPEX and labor savings. The Z-PLUG offers quick, reliable terminations for custom-length direct connections to Wi-Fi access points, surveillance cameras, and other devices that are well-suited for modular plug-terminated links (MPTLs), eliminating unnecessary outlets, patch cords, and faceplates for labor and material savings.

Growing Globally Together

With hundreds of upgrades now complete, the franchise operator is collaborating with Siemon and Graybar to roll out upgrades for other recently acquired franchises. “We’re currently rolling out IP surveillance systems for another fast-food brand with Siemon solutions like the UltraMax System and Z-PLUG using the same standardized kitting approach. We will then tackle technology upgrades for additional brands, including a complete overhaul of more than 500 iconic fast-food locations in 2024,” says Nash

As part of the franchise operator's initiative to expand globally, they also plan to analyze technology needs for additional acquisitions abroad. Partnering with Graybar and Siemon will help them achieve the same quality, performance, and consistency anywhere in the world.

With worldwide manufacturing, logistics, and sales capabilities and a global network of certified installers and technology and

distribution partners, Siemon has a local presence in more than 40 countries. A key part of that global footprint is Siemon Global Project Services (GPS), a division of Siemon that serves as the single point of contact for rolling out consistent, high-quality delivery of multi-site network infrastructure projects anywhere in the world. With an innovative services team to proactively manage global installations with consistency and quality across every site, Siemon GPS will allow the franchise operator to realize the same success with international locations they achieved in North America. Graybar also has overseas partnerships with value-added resellers (VARs) to set up inventory and provide training to implement the same kitting process.

“One of the great franchising successes is the ability to walk into any location and have the same experience. Partnering with Siemon and using a standardized, strategic kitting process helps maintain that experience anywhere in the world. It works so well that we are committed to working with Siemon and using the same process for future franchise upgrades.”

- Jeff Nash Senior Account Manager, Graybar