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DINEAmerica Members Save Plenty Every Time They Dine Out

With a Little Help from an Eltron Card Printer

In the early-1990s, Peoria, Illinois-based businessman and frequent restaurant visitor, Mark Schlitt began thinking about ways to improve the current diner discounts that were available in the area. Schlitt was familiar with several frequent diner programs but was not satisfied with their benefits. The programs either didn't offer significant savings or there were major drawbacks to using the program. For example, the savings may be only applicable to a specific number of patrons in the dining party; or the discounts were limited to dinner only. Schlitt realized that frequent-dining consumers wanted a discount membership that offered coupon-like savings without the one-time use limitations of coupons.



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Creating Frequent Buyers

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Schlitt took these complaints and concerns to heart, and in 1996, he founded DINEAmerica to help frequent restaurant goers "Save Plenty Every Time You Dine Out," which is the company's slogan. "I wanted to create the type of discount dining organization that provided the advantages that the other programs lacked, and I wanted it to be the type of club I would want to join," said Schlitt.

Today DINEAmerica provides approximately 8,000 central Illinois residents with discount dining benefits at more than 300 popular and critically-acclaimed restaurants in Peoria, East Peoria, Bloomington, Champaign, and surrounding areas.



For an annual membership of \$49.95 or \$34.95 for six months, restaurant goers can choose from all types of local area eateries and save 20 percent off their final bill every time they visit a participating establishment. The discounts apply to members dining alone or in groups of up to six people and are valid for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Five hotels have joined the DINEAmerica family, offering members special get away packages that include significant savings on lodging, hotel restaurants, and tourist attractions. All DINEAmerica restaurants are listed in a handy directory providing information on each establishment including sample menus, etc.

Experiencing tremendous growth since its inception, DINEAmerica has expanded from just 27 Peoria area listings in 1996 to more than 250 today and it's still adding to the list. As a result, Schlitt has continually evaluated his business' processes and procedures and sought ways to improve membership service, recruit more restaurants and hotels, and build the number of members.

The Business Challenge

As Schlitt was enjoying DINEAmerica's incredible growth, he noticed a significant problem. The company staff spent an enormous amount of time producing cards for new applicants and renewing members. To become a member, diners fill out an application and send it to Schlitt's office in Mackinaw, Illinois where it is processed. A new membership packet is then mailed to the applicant. The packet includes the restaurant directory and his/her membership card with the person's name, address and DINEAmerica expiration date.

During DINEAmerica's first two years, Schlitt and his staff would manually type the new applicant's information into a database program. Then, they would retype the information into a label program, print the label, affix it to a plastic card, and send it off in the new member kit. In addition,



Eltron P310 Printer



when Schlitt received renewal payments from current members, he would update the person's record in the database then re-enter the member's information in the label program in order to print a label for a new card. Since 1996, Schlitt and his staff have printed cards at least twice a week to ensure that new and renewing members receive their DINEAmerica cards as soon as possible so they can quickly enjoy the organization's benefits. Due to the ever increasing level of activity, it was imperative that the company find a way to cut down on the processing time. Another problem was the card labels were not durable and peeled off under certain circumstances. They were also spending a large amount of time and money producing replacement ID cards for members who lost or damaged their old ones accidentally.

"We were spending too much time replacing members' damaged cards that would not have become damaged if the cards were more durable. It was a real problem," said Schlitt. "DINEAmerica had to incur the cost to replace the cards because it wasn't the members' fault the card wasn't strong enough to endure ordinary wear and tear with use."

The Solution

Schlitt began researching a solution that would allow DINEAmerica to cost-effectively and efficiently produce durable membership cards that would endure weather, accidents, clothes washing and other circumstances that damaged cards. "I began looking into how we could internally produce plastic membership cards. A card printer reseller introduced me to the Eltron P310 card printer," said Schlitt. "I purchased the product more than four years ago, and it has successfully produced thousands of DINEAmerica membership cards for my organization ever since."

Schlitt uses the Eltron P310, an easy-to-use card printer that produces ultra-sharp, full-color plastic cards at a rate of 144 cards per hour, producing high-quality, durable plastic cards that are much more durable than his original method of making cards.

Bottom Line Results

Using a PC, the Eltron P310 and the firm's membership software, Schlitt and his staff only need to type the new member's name into the database once. With a simple press of the computer's print key, the printer produces cards for new and renewing members. "With the Eltron printer, we don't have to spend extra time in the office re-entering names and affixing labels to the plastic cards to make sure our members receive their memberships quickly."

DINEAmerica members no longer request nearly as many replacements for damaged cards. In fact, Schlitt said that now the only cards he spends time replacing are those that customers have lost.

According to Schlitt, adding the Eltron card printer system has saved DINEAmerica about two percent on the company's bottomline. "I have been very pleased with the results," he adds.

Future Uses for DINEAmerica's Eltron Printer

As DINEAmerica continues to grow, Schlitt is planning other uses for the Eltron card printer including adding a magnetic stripe to membership cards that incorporate the person's name, address and other information.

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The stripe will also keep track of how many times the person patronizes a particular restaurant. This feature would allow individual restaurants to implement loyalty programs via DINEAmerica membership cards. For example, a particular establishment might choose to give the customer a complimentary bottle of wine for his/her tenth DINEAmerica visit. In addition, he will soon provide a photo ID of the member on his/her DINEAmerica card.

For charitable organizations that receive DINEAmerica membership discounts, such as Catepillar Employees Club and the Lutheran Group Home Benevolent Fund, Schlitt plans on incorporating the groups' logos onto their DINEAmerica cards.

"I have strategies in place designed to expand DINEAmerica's reach beyond central Illinois, and personalized plastic loyalty cards will be an instrumental part of our expansion by helping provide members with the key to DINEAmerica's benefits," said Schlitt.

With so much success, does Schlitt still find time to use his own DINEAmerica card while dining out? "You bet," said Schlitt. "I love visiting our restaurant partners and proudly use my DINEAmerica card when I'm there."

