



Customers Top Pecking Order at Chicken Eatery

Restaurant managers push CIO for more time with customers

By Jane Glasser

By the end of the week, Antonio Silva sat tense and frazzled at his desk, feeling not an ounce of *gees*, the Afrikaans word for spirit, or spark. His company, Nando's, has adopted the term to describe the essence of its culture: to have an adventurous spirit, a can-do attitude, and a hearty appetite for life. Instead, Silva was in constant firefighting mode, trying to keep his company's antiquated computer systems running.

Nando's is a fast-casual restaurant chain based in Johannesburg, South Africa, that specializes in a tongue-tingling dish called Peri-Peri Flame-Grilled Chicken. The secret ingredient is the fiery bird's-eye chili pepper, called peri-peri by the Portuguese explorers who incorporated it into their cooking 200 years ago. There are 240 Nando's restaurants in South Africa and another 360 around the world. Peri-Peri Flame-Grilled Chicken is served in 32 countries on five continents, and with it the signature Nando's attitude that attracts *Nandocas*—people “with fire in their bellies, who love to laugh and eat.”

Antonio Silva is Chief Information Officer of Nando's South Africa and is responsible for the invisible technology underpinnings of the 240 restaurants located in that country. Invisible, because Silva sees his job as providing behind-the-scenes support to make the company's South African restaurant managers wildly successful. And wild success at Nando's means fiery food and fabulous service, not computer proficiency.

Diverted from Guests

“Each restaurant has a computer to help the managers run their businesses, but we definitely do not want our restaurant managers

sitting behind computers,” Silva says. “Customer service is the biggest differentiator for fast-casual eateries. If the manager is stuck in the back room wrestling with the computer, rather than on the floor with customers and staff, service levels of the entire staff suffer.”

When Silva came on board, the company's technology infrastructure was aged and creaky and required continuous software updates and emergency repairs to keep it going. Silva had four full-time engineers traveling around the country to breathe life back into broken restaurant computers. “We did not have the capability to do remote support or proactive software updates, so we were always in reactionary mode,” Silva says. “I worried constantly about keeping our network and e-mail system up and running.”

Where Silva really wanted to be was in the field, with restaurant managers, understanding their needs, and coming up with new solutions to move the business forward.

Another drag on productivity companywide was the company's lack of a central mechanism for sharing knowledge. When a manager solved a problem in Asia, the solution remained with that individual, with no way for the rest of the company to benefit from it. Store managers and management wasted time every day hunting for information across hundreds of shared files and e-mail trails—often reinventing the wheel.

Getting His Gees Back

Silva wanted to put the company's technology systems in better order and put the *gees* back



Nando's is a South African-based restaurant chain with franchises in 32 countries.

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Antonio Silva, Chief Information Officer, Nando's

into his soul. He started by implementing a centralized directory service—the Active Directory® service, an integral part of the Windows Server® 2003 operating system—which helped staff automate routine network administrative chores and manage systems remotely. Silva estimates that the use of Active Directory saves Nando's staff 50 hours a month, which he's redirected to new initiatives. More importantly, the network maintenance efficiencies give restaurant managers more time to devote to customer care.

More Mobile Freedom, Less Heartache

Silva replaced the company's unreliable e-mail messaging system with Microsoft® Exchange Server 2003 messaging and collaboration server, which provides mobile access to e-mail messages from anywhere in the country using a smartphone or wireless-enabled portable computer. "Exchange Server 2003 has enabled us to be a more mobile, decentralized company, which supports our restaurant-driven business model," Silva says. "Exchange Server is saving my staff at least 20 hours a month, allowing us to focus on more strategic projects and saves me a lot of heartache." For simpler management, Nando's licenses its messaging software under the Software as a Service (SaaS) model, through a local Internet Service Provider, Internet Solutions.

Peri Portal for Sharing Great Ideas

Another exciting new capability Silva plans to roll out is a central, Web-accessible knowledge base called the Peri Portal, where employees can pool and share tribal knowledge, find people and answers, and learn how to cook the latest peri-peri dish. "We want to give employees one place to go to learn about the latest products, find out how other restaurants have solved problems, and locate human resources and training information," Silva says. "The timesavings could run into the hundreds of hours a month because employees are

more efficient at finding information and not duplicating work already done."

The Peri Portal will support the entrepreneurial culture of Nando's by providing a place to share new ideas, successes, and failures. For example, one restaurant came up with unique marketing materials to promote business during Ramadan. Their efforts were successful; and through the Peri Portal, they'll be able to share them with other Nando's restaurants that serve large Muslim populations.

Silva is building the Peri Portal from Microsoft Office SharePoint® Portal Server 2003 collaboration software, Microsoft SQL Server™ 2005 database software, and analytical software from ProClarity.

Catching Flubs Before They Flop

In addition to providing a central place for sharing ideas, Peri Portal will give Nando's a way to distill business insights from restaurant sales data. Today, managers have to request reports from the IT staff and interpret the reports on their own. Using business intelligence tools built into the portal, Silva will be able to publish trend reports that provide managers with insights such as the top ten growth items and the top ten "decliners" for each restaurant.

"We want to use business intelligence to be proactive rather than reactive," Silva says. If Nando's launches a new product and gets it wrong, business intelligence tools will allow management to pick up on the misstep early on, so the cooks can head back into the kitchen and tinker with the idea before the company loses a lot of money.

With smart technology helping to run the business behind the scenes, Silva is sleeping better, smiling more, and generally getting his gees back. "Having the right technology makes our people more productive and effective and makes my life a lot more enjoyable," he says.

For more information about Nando's call +27 11 216 3320 or visit the Web site at: www.nandos.co.za