

A Soup-er Restaurant Technology Solution for Zoup!

A growing restaurant chain built on hand-crafted soup taps technology from NEXTEP SYSTEMS to help it manage store operations.

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By Richard Slawsky
FastCasual.com

NEXTEP SYSTEMS, based in Troy, Mich., provides a complete suite of integrated foodservice technology solutions for restaurants, corporate cafeterias, casinos, airports and other high-volume foodservice venues. From self-order to cloud-based point of sale to digital signage, NEXTEP provides and supports the complete integrated foodservice platform.

Southfield, Mich.-based **Zoup! Fresh Soup Company** launched in 1997 from a soup-related foodservice business. The original company—which manufactured and distributed wholesale soup and spice products—gave the partners access to top chefs and managers at hundreds of restaurants. The partners confirmed what they suspected all along: really good soup is hard to find and there is a strong demand in the marketplace for hand-crafted, fresh soups that people love but won't typically make at home.

Encouraged by the chefs they spoke with and armed with their industry experience and passion for soup, the founders teamed up with a talented chef who believed in the strength of their concept. The partners opened their first location in the Detroit suburb of Southfield, Mich., and within five years added five more Detroit-area locations. The company opened its first franchise in 2004 and now operates 55 locations in 13 states as well as Canada.





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The challenge

In the company’s early days, Zoup! operated with a Web-based point of sale and reporting system developed by the company’s founders. While rich in features, it suffered from a few weaknesses that became increasingly apparent as the company expanded.

“While our homegrown system was great for the business at the time, it was not scalable and did not have the level of support that we knew we needed for a growing franchise,” said Zoup! founder and managing partner Eric Ersher.

In addition, the original system lacked the support for some features that franchisees were requesting, including online ordering. It became obvious the company needed a technology partner that could help support its growth.

“We have a background in soup and we always found professionals who could help us with the technology. We wanted to make sure that we had a system that provided the restaurant with the foundation to add features to, and who could support our franchisees and our customers,” said Ersher.

As it turned out, the Zoup! founders didn’t have to look any further than ...right down the street.

The solution

After considering a number of technology options, the Zoup! founders chose the Foundation5 platform from Troy, Mich.-based NEXTEP SYSTEMS. Zoup installed the system in its Troy location first, later rolling the system out to all 55 locations.

“We knew NEXTEP was strong when it came to customer facing technology such as kiosks,” Ersher said. “We felt their experience in dealing with consumers and interfacing with technology would provide a great foundation for our own POS.”

Foundation5 is scalable and secure, having been approved by the Payment Card Industry (PCI) for deployment. Multiple payment options are supported, including cash, credit and gift cards, with mobile payments on tap for the future.

Zoup! is employing NEXTEP front-of-house solutions including Cloud-based Point of Sale, Dynamic Digital Menu Displays, Order Management Systems and integrated Online Ordering. Using the enterprise-scalable solution, restaurant operators can manage from one to as many stores as they operate with one simple tool, mynextep.net. Menus, menu boards,



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prices and other features for all restaurants are centrally managed. Authorized users can change prices of one item or change entire menus from the Web-based management tool, providing for franchise compliance with corporate items across multiple stores or even multiple concepts.

The mynextep.net tool offers the ability to manage inventory and create a variety of reports across one or multiple locations. With mynextep.net, Zoup! can show real-time depletion of food, shrinkage, food costs to the penny and cost of goods sold at any time with the click of a mouse. The system also offers the standard reporting features needed to operate a restaurant such as real-time sales and labor reports as well as some exclusive to NEXTEP. The Cloud-based POS and Order Management System even offers key performance indicators on the spot, instantly on screen at the touch of an icon.

And with the myEmployees module, operators can input expected sales for a particular day and the tool informs them of the number of labor hours required to staff their restaurant. Owners can then drag and drop employees onto that schedule, simultaneously keeping track of labor hours. They also can copy schedules from other days, see same-day sales from previous weeks and adjust for busier times if necessary.

“This is the perfect example of the scalability of Foundation5 Point of Sale as an enterprise-quality technology solution,” said NEXTEP SYSTEMS president Tommy Woycik. “A company like Zoup! that uses new technology for growth is exactly the kind of customer we look for.”

The results

Because Zoup! restaurants change soup offerings daily, integration was a critical feature. With Foundation5, changing the price of an item, adding a new item or making any other changes modifies all points on the solution including the POS, digital menu boards, online ordering portals and the company’s website, effectively eliminating the headache and labor involved with legacy systems in making those changes individually for every point of the solution.

Data for the solution is stored in the cloud, reducing the need for extra, vulnerable physical hardware to store that information. Software updates and any changes occur immediately for small fixes and menu modifications, or nightly for large updates as NEXTEP SYSTEMS pushes them out. And although the system is cloud-based, it provides full functionality when Internet connections go out. The data is stored locally and pushed up to the cloud when the connection is restored.



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About the sponsor:

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“The POS itself is feature-rich, and we worked very closely with Zoup! to add a great deal more functionality,” Woycik said. “The POS handles split tenders, gift card processing, easy drawer management, holding orders and more, while offering on-the-spot reporting, easy and instant recognition of any problems in the system on screen and an innovative and intuitive menu flow featuring conversational ordering for quick order entry and prompted upselling.”

When a problem occurs with a legacy solution there are fingers pointing both ways and results don’t come quickly or easily, Woycik said. With Foundation5, issues are much fewer. In the event of a problem, NEXTEP SYSTEM’s support team can identify it immediately and begin working on a solution.

While those features all sound impressive on paper, they don’t mean much if they don’t accomplish one specific goal: helping operators run their businesses more efficiently.

Zoup! had NEXTEP incorporate a label printer, allowing operators to print labels for each soup, salad, and sandwich. That feature helped operators increase order accuracy, increasing customer satisfaction in the process.

In addition, the company has seen a significant improvement in transaction speed, which was a factor in deciding to make Foundation5 a fixture in every new location.

“The transaction speed is one of the greatest improvements we’ve seen,” Ersher said.

“The average number of transactions per hour increased by 9 percent,” he said. “We’ve seen people hit new highs with the system. That certainly helps top-line sales, and that helps everything else.”