

Case Study

From Scratch: Building a New Dining Service

One of a series of reports of the results of Clarion projects, illustrating ways in which dining and hospitality services are improved and new opportunities to increase sales are created. Names and identifying details are omitted to protect our client's anonymity.

Dining Insights, Summer 2015

In the dynamic world of high finance, it isn't unusual for an aggressive young company to grow big fast. That was the case with one financial firm in a center city high rise office building. Three years ago, when its population was about 500, we designed and advised the firm in the opening of a service pantry in its conference center, its first in-house dining service facility.

THE SITUATION: The firm continued to grow and take more space in its building, soon approaching 2,000 employees. Management decided it was time for a full-service dining facility. They called on Clarion again. Angela Phelan, senior vice president, led the project.

The decision to install a dining facility in a built office tower is easier to make than implement. Space is tight and expensive; rent can be \$100 per square foot; a kitchen and servery have high utility requirements.

THE PROJECT: The project had two components: develop the concepts, design and build the new facility, then select a food service company to operate it.

Financial firms, law firms and similar organizations have specialized requirements that are different from those of the typical corporate dining service. Business is conducted in conference rooms where bankers or attorneys meet with clients to plan and negotiate deals. Service of meals and refreshments promptly, unobtrusively and on short notice – with no mistakes– is essential.

Many financial firms, such as this one, have an additional special requirement: The care and feeding of their traders, who work at buying and selling securities, commodities and other financial instruments in the global, 24-hour marketplace. They can't leave their computer screens for very long, if at all, for amenities like lunch.

PLANNING: Our prior experience with financial firms enabled her to understand these specialized demands. This was especially important because no one at the firm had any experience with in-house dining services. We explained to management that they had to agree on the service requirements first, then plan the operating system, then design the facility to fit these requirements.

The plan includes a web-based remote system employees can use to order meals, to be picked up at a counter adjoining the servery. Traders and other time-pressed people can obtain food and be back at their desks to eat and work within minutes.

Those with the time can come to a compact servery for food, mostly prepared to order at the service counter. They can take their meals back to their offices or have lunch in the seating area with a window wall overlooking the busy street scene below.

THE FOOD: The company president wants the dining service to be more than a refueling station, It should serve only healthy foods.

We crafted a menu format centered around “functional foods,” prepared from “scratch” on-site, to order as possible, utilizing fresh, local products.

THE DESIGN: In collaboration with the architect, and Raymond/Raymond Associates, the dining facilities design firm that provides technical support for our projects, we designed the

facility to fit the plan. Everything had to be compact because of the limited space available.

Challenges included locating an entryway and creating a traffic pattern for customers within the small footprint. Food production facilities had to be in two connected, but separate sections, for the cafe and for catering.

As planning for the expanded offices went on, space for the dining facility contracted and changed shape several times, each requiring a re-design before a final format was settled.

FINDING AN OPERATOR: Not many food service companies have the experience to operate this type of dining service. We identified four – two national, one regional and one local – to receive a Request for Proposals.

After a review of the proposals, the four companies were invited to be interviewed by the client and Clarion. The process resulted in narrowing the field to two finalists. After visits to the finalists' other operations and extensive financial and contractual negotiations, one of the national companies was awarded the contract.

OUTCOME: Dining facility construction is under way. The contractor's specialists are participating with us and management in planning the opening, scheduled for this fall.

CLARION'S ROLE: Our prior hands-on experience in comparable companies' dining services enabled us to provide imaginative and realistic solutions for both the services and operating system as well as the facilities design and selection of the right operator.