Impact of Operating Systems on Fast-food Restaurant Business: Case Development Process

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Our company, Chick-fil-A, Inc., worked with Drs. Chetan Sankar and P.K. Raju and the LITEE team to develop a case study about our decision process to select a new point of sale system. They were understanding of our concerns about ensuring accuracy in the case study and were sympathetic to my limited time to work on this project. The process of creating the case study was iterative and didn't impose on my busy schedule. First, I went to Auburn and was interviewed by Dr. Sankar and a graduate student. After the interview, they e-mailed me transcripts of our conversation with some follow up questions for clarification. I was able to clarify points and to edit the transcripts for accuracy. Then, the LITEE team came to our office and discussed the decision process with Jon Bridges, CIO, and Mike Erbrick, Director of Restaurant Information Systems. In addition, we visited the Chick-fil-A at Piedmont Road in Atlanta, GA to see the chosen point of sale system in the field. The LITEE team interviewed the owner/operator of this store to learn the strengths and weaknesses of this system. Again, summaries of these conversations and observations were exchanged, and I could clarify or correct for accurateness. In the end, we had a case study that framed the key decision factors for a decision involving millions of dollars for us.

In the spring of 2001, I was able to attend the first class presentation for the Chick-fil-A Point of Sale case study. It was exciting to hear the students discuss the challenge of weighing pros and cons of business decisions. I also enjoyed hearing them suggest new ideas or technologies that have matured since we made our decision. The most rewarding result of this case study was seeing that many students mentioned the importance of meeting the business needs, not just picking a technology. Successful IT professionals are successful business people first. IT must align itself with the business. Project success depends on meeting the expectations of your users; not from telling your user, we picked this leading software package—Oracle, Siebel, PeopleSoft, etc. You have to understand the users' needs, prioritize their needs, and implement solutions based on those needs. Sometimes, it is the best decision to select a hot technology; sometimes, boring technologies are best.

In addition, this case study has helped our recruiting efforts. Believe it or not, Chick-fil-A is not the first company that comes to mind when students think about future technology careers. When students hear Chick-fil-A, they usually think about jobs with the marketing department or owner/operator opportunities. Since this case study has been added to the curriculum, we have interviewed more than 20 students who have worked on the point of sale case study. After discussing Chick-fil-A in an MIS class, students begin to associate technology career options with Chick-fil-A, and they think of us as a company that uses new technology to impact the business.

I am glad that the LITEE team invited us to develop this case study. It seems to help students learn important business concepts, and it has greatly helped us to develop an image of a company that offers exciting technology opportunities. I would definitely be interested in working on another case study in the future.

Michael Garrison, Director of I.T. Client Services, is an alumnus of Auburn University, where he received a BS in Finance. Michael earned his MBA in Computer Information Systems at Georgia St. University. Today, Michael works with the Chick-fil-A Computer Help Line,

the windows system administration team, the network administration team, and the I.T. recruiting. The Chick-fil-A Computer Help Line supports point-of-sale systems and back office systems for over 900 Chick-fil-A restaurants. The Windows System Administration team purchases PCs, configures them, rolls out new software and operating systems, and provides laptop/desktop support for more than 500 corporate staff and 900 stores. The network administration team manages our Microsoft Back Office networking systems and network applications. The I.T. recruiting team recruits, selects, and hires individuals to work in the I.T. department at Chick-fil-A. This team also coordinates the performance management system and professional development plans.