

CKE Reduces Needless Site Rollout Costs with Online Project Management Tool

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For some restaurateurs, rollout issues may understandably not be "top of mind" these days. But whether operators face rollout challenges today or will face them tomorrow, it is still smart to stay updated on best practices associated with a key aspect of rollout: online project management.

One of America's largest fast-food chains, [CKE](#) has more than 3,100 franchised, licensed or company-operated restaurants in America and around the world, including some 1,200 Carl's Jr.'s outlets and more than 1,900 Hardee's restaurants. All told, approximately 45 new freestanding restaurants are delivered annually and up to 100 are re-imaged, a pace that is expected to remain stable or increase.



Rollout challenges

Fast-food rollout can pose special challenges. Maintaining a prototypical image can be difficult when communities demand architecture upgrades for particular developments or planning zones. Restaurants also require sites to be large enough to accommodate adequate parking while providing mandatory landscape setbacks, and drive-through stacking lanes.

Ineffective rollout can be costly. Missed dates will delay openings and force pre-term rent payments. Landlords and sellers often stipulate short entitlement timetables. Months can be lost by missing a local agency's entitlement deadline.

Several years ago, CKE Restaurants, Inc, parent company of the Carl's Jr. and Hardee's chains, began searching for an online system that would allow them to better coordinate the development process. It quickly discovered that most "off-the-shelf" management systems were not adaptable enough to address the myriad rollout-related issues that were faced.

Management ultimately settled upon [USGN's](#) online project management system, largely for its customizable design. Management can conform it to meet their needs rather than modify their process to accommodate the tool.

CKE also chose to bid architecture work to six national firms. Management determined the best pricing from three of them, assigned projects to the three finalists, and monitored their performance, costs and cooperation. Two firms stood out, so management divided the work between them and made them available to the Carl's Jr. and Hardee's franchise community.

One designated company, Atlanta-based [GreenbergFarrow](#), boasts good representation around the country and knows local processes. As a national company, they share the load among offices and meet deadlines. Communications flow easily and response time is minimal. Also, GreenbergFarrow was a long-time user of the USGN platform. They helped CKE customize the tool and their prior experience building their own site was invaluable in creating CKE's initial site.

Instant access

CKEProjects.com helps management make market-planning decisions and begin site investigation online with instant access to project managers, architects and consultants. Once a site is under contract, plan development and bidding are all completed on USGN. This saves plan distribution costs and facilitates the award process. The system handles all contractor communications, including draws and RFI's. Close-out and construction accounting are also completed on the

platform.

CKE ultimately developed a well-documented and customized program that follows the development process in an intuitive way. False starts are eliminated. The process is transparent, and all parties must agree to move forward. CKE greatly reduced dead site costs because of the new ability to monitor progress more closely. Bid costs have been virtually eliminated.

Also, CKE's marketing team can proactively review site-specific sign programs, with communications chronologically documented. The equipment distribution company, point-of-sale provider and security team can instantly access project status. More than a tracking tool, the site also evolved into a repository for bid documents, contracts, images and communications.

Key in-house participants involved in rollout, along with GreenbergFarrow, keep fine-tuning the system. Ongoing customization helps eliminate the surprises that trigger delays and additional rollout-related costs. CKE's experience shows that proper online project management maximizes the efficiency of the complex and demanding rollout process.