

# Curbside Convenience

Tech startup FlyBuy creates virtual drive-thrus



**SATISFIED CUSTOMERS** Restaurateurs say they can tell when customers are happy with FlyBuy's "exact" GPS function. "The driver's face lights up" when an order is quickly delivered, one operator says.

**A**t a time when convenience can be a key traffic driver, young tech player FlyBuy Technologies Inc. is offering restaurants the opportunity to create a virtual drive-thru.

Using the FlyBuy app, customers can place orders and pay online before pulling up curbside to a restaurant where an employee is waiting to hand over the order through the car window. Launched in 2013, Seattle-based FlyBuy boasts about 2,000 users and 71 restaurants, including 45 in Washington state,

15 in Oregon, four in Missouri, six in Minnesota and one in Florida.

"We heard about a coffeehouse the next town over that was using FlyBuy and we thought it was a great option for customers in a hurry or with children in car seats,"

said Crystal Ray, owner of Our Story Coffee House in St. Louis.

She said a new drive-thru Starbucks is scheduled to open nearby but, because her coffeehouse is located inside a 100-year-old house, adding a drive-thru to her coffeehouse is not an option.

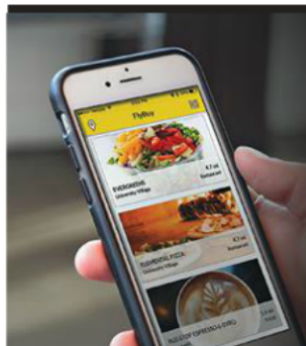
The notion of the virtual drive-thru is also being built into the DNA of some new restaurant concepts. Starbird Chicken in Sunnyvale, Calif., for example, allows guests to mobile order and pay, and food is delivered to their car when they arrive and tap an "I'm here" button in the restaurant app.

The success of the virtual drive-thru relies on Global Positioning System, or GPS, technology and a responsive staff.

With FlyBuy, customers first use the app to search participating restaurants' menus, then order and pay.

Via a FlyBuy-issued tablet, the restaurant is notified that an order has been placed. Staffers can then accept the order and enter an estimated preparation time.

Once the order is ready, the restaurant staff uses the tablet to notify the customer, whose exact arrival is tracked through GPS. The tablet chimes when



## THE VIRTUAL DRIVE-THRU

**1. SEARCH.** Customers first use the app to search participating restaurants' menus.

**2. ORDER.** The customers then order and pay using the app.

**3. NOTIFY.** When a customer places an order, the restaurant is notified via a FlyBuy-issued tablet. Staffers can then accept the order and enter an estimated preparation time.

**4. READY.** The staff uses the tablet to notify the customer, whose exact arrival is tracked through GPS that the order is ready.

**5. THE TABLET CHIMES.** The customer is about to pull up, and staff knows to head outside with the order.



**RAIN OR SHINE** FlyBuy benefits those in a hurry or with kids in the car, but Planet Smoothie's Jonathan Goodyear says customers can also stay dry during Orlando's flash rainstorms.

the customer is about to pull up, and staff knows to head outside with the order.

"We hand the order through the passenger window, and they say thank you and drive off," said Ray, whose customers

pull up out front along the sidewalk. "It takes less than a minute."

There's not even a need for a designated pickup spot, according to Ryan Suddendorf, co-owner of Evergreen Salad in Seattle, who has been the one to bring food out to customers when his company first adopted the service about a year and a half ago.

"Because the GPS is so exact, you walk out just as the customer pulls up and when you make eye contact, the driver's face lights up as if to say, 'The app worked!'" he said.

While Evergreen Salad has five locations, Suddendorf uses FlyBuy at the restaurant outside of the city because it's in a lifestyle center where parking is tough.

"In the FlyBuy tablet, you can draw the path that you want the driver to take. We're in this complex parking lot with multiple entrances so we instruct FlyBuy customers to use one certain entrance so it pulls them straight in front," he said.

"We work with restaurants to figure out the best place to have drivers pull over," said FlyBy CEO Will Merritt. "In some situations, we've even talked with malls and groups of restaurants to share one spot. But really our goal is to make the handoff so well timed, customers will need a place to stop for just a few seconds."

While there is no cost to customers — the prices they pay through the app are the same as ordering inside the restaurant — FlyBuy makes its revenue by charging restaurants 10 percent of the order total.

"We also give customers the option to tip and we found that 80 percent of the time they do," said Merritt.

"Unlike services like UberEats — in which the tip goes to a third-party driver — FlyBuy tips go to restaurant staff."

Jonathan Goodyear, franchise owner of Planet Smoothie in Orlando, Fla., sees an additional benefit for customers using FlyBuy.

"We have flash rainstorms so

this gives customers the option of staying dry in their car," said Goodyear, who is currently the only restaurant operator using FlyBuy on the East Coast.

"We saw value in being early adopters because by the time FlyBuy gets a bigger network of users locally, [we'll have] a foothold in the market already," said Goodyear.

While most restaurants promote the service through social media and table and register signs, Goodyear worked with FlyBuy to offer a 20-percent discount on customers' first FlyBuy order.

"Through our loyalty program, we are able to text customers the FlyBuy offer as well as a link to download the app," he said.

Goodyear also said a drive-thru Starbucks is about to open across the street.

"Even though Starbucks is not really a competitor for us, if someone doesn't want to get out of their car, we want to be able to be an option for them too," said Goodyear. **RH**

— Amanda McCorquodale

## NUMBERS

10%

OF THE ORDER TOTAL

THE AMOUNT CHARGED TO RESTAURANTS BY FLYBUY, NOT THE CONSUMERS

80%

OF FLYBUY CUSTOMERS TIP

USERS HAVE THE OPTION OF TIPPING AND TIPS GO DIRECTLY TO RESTAURANT STAFF