

## Restaurant Magic Software

Steve Roberts is CTO & Founder of **Restaurant Magic Software**, developers of [Data Central](#), a web-based restaurant back office solution.

First we spoke about how Steve is noticing a trend toward centralization, not just in storing data but in the entire back office application. 'We are seeing one dying trend and another emerging trend,' he explains.

'The dying trend is web-browser deployed solutions; they're fine as first generation deployments but are extremely limited. The emerging trend is toward a richer user experience; something that brings the best of the browser-based experience and combines it with the best of the distributed application experience – commonly referred to as a "Smart Client".'

Steve tells how when Data Central was created there were only fat client and thin client solutions available to the restaurant industry, but with the advent of Microsoft's .Net, a new web-based deployment model was made possible: the Data Central smart client.

Most browser-based thin client applications suffer from a range of built-in deficiencies that negatively impact the user experience, he continues, such as loss of data if the Internet goes down. Steve thinks the trend away from the browser and toward the smart client has come from software users demanding a better web experience. 'Users want a faster, friendlier, multi-tasking, rich interface like the fat-client version they gave up for the browser. IT wants the lower TCO and control of the centralized solution. The good news is that Data Central delivers both,' he says.

Data Central customers are apparently demanding overall reporting flexibility. Steve tells how the company recently acquired a new Canadian customer based upon their reporting flexibility. 'Data Central was the only provider that could produce the strategic reporting they required,' says Roberts. 'Our customers have made it abundantly clear that providing basic features for managing food and labor costs is simply not enough; they demand flexibility in their reporting and without the added expense of customization.'

He adds that customers want a proprietary systems experience without having to write it themselves; they want a system that can be moulded to their business rather than having to mould their business to a system. Data Central is now incorporating more and

more content into their product, such as data from speed of service and kitchen display systems, secret shopper, weather, application tracking, employee "onboarding" and certification, and other sources.

'Unfortunately, collecting data from or writing data to external systems is still a challenge in the restaurant technology segment because many of the POS providers, restaurant suppliers, and other data collection systems continue to see data as proprietary instead of belonging to the customer,' says Steve.

Data Central is principally deployed as a smart client, but also provides browser access to reports and features. 'We believe the in-store and above-store users deserve the fastest, easiest, most flexible system possible, and the only way to deliver is via our smart client,' notes Steve. The Data Central smart client, once installed, is centrally updated and configured and can work as a full-fledged restaurant management solution or as a background data collection engine doing regular-interval automated data collection from POS, kitchen display, and speed of service systems.

*'Our customers insist that data be freely exchanged from system to system.'*

Steve believes the restaurant industry is resilient and that smart operators will continue to innovate, including selecting systems that enhance their margins. 'Our primary market - the mid-tier to large enterprise - will continue to invest in systems that provide vital information for business management and analysis, this in turn building better operations,' he predicts, adding that many of their target market have started to look beyond their internal IT groups for business solutions, and will increasingly adopt systems available as SaaS.

Steve also thinks that organizations are starting to question the overall cost of 'build and deploy' as good investments, and are looking to best of breed SaaS solutions such as Data Central to meet their organizational requirements with less overall cost.

'The next 12-24 months will see many converts to both the SaaS and smart client delivery models,' says the CTO.

