

RESTAURANTS AND FOOD SAFETY:

SAFETY:

How mobile software is changing the game

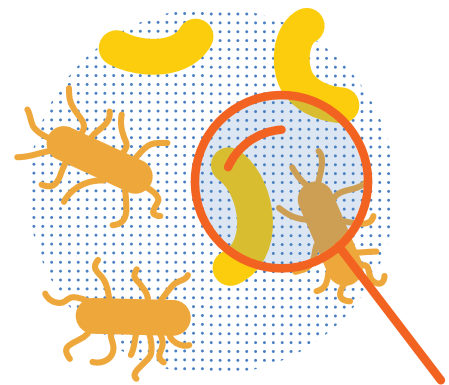




Food Safety managers are the last line of defense against dangerous bacteria. Their commitment to quality protects us from receiving undercooked or poorly prepared meals — something many of us take for granted these days. But beyond that, the actions of a food safety manager can have major ramifications on a restaurant's business.

And while food safety management has improved dramatically through the years, there are still too many incidents of people getting sick, even dying from contaminated food. In fact, restaurants are responsible for 60% of all E.coli and Salmonella outbreaks in the US, causing more than 2,000 deaths and 77,000 hospitalizations each year.

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In this paper, we'll discuss how a food safety program based on the continuous auditing of store operations, food hygiene, and brand compliance can dramatically improve food safety in restaurants. We'll rehash some recent food safety nightmares, and go into what can be done to avoid them in the future. We'll discuss the growing number of food-related regulations and we'll talk about how mobile technologies are helping restaurants drive continuous improvement by proactively finding and fixing problems on an ongoing basis.

Consumers are watching

In 1993, an E.coli outbreak killed 4 children and left 732 people in the hospital. A similar incident occurred in December 2006 when contaminated lettuce from a fast food location got 71 people sick, 8 with kidney failure. Most recently, a 2015 norovirus at a popular restaurant chain infected more than 500 people and killed 4...damaging their reputation for years to come.

These days, any type of food-related outbreak can be a PR disaster. News travels quickly on social media (especially when it relates to foodborne illnesses), and stories like these are driving consumer food safety awareness to an all-time high.

Any loss in consumer confidence after an outbreak can be devastating to any restaurant, regardless of how delicious the food may be. Consider the way consumers reacted to the 2015 incident, for example. As news of a food safety crisis spread, the restaurant's customer traffic plummeted. Sales plunged by more than 36%, and nearly two years later their public perception has still yet to fully recover.



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Regulatory belts are tightening

To address rising consumer concerns, federal and state governments are tightening the belt on restaurants, and imposing a number of new standards and practices to address food safety. Along with the ongoing mandate from leadership to meet operational KPIs, restaurants are also expected to prove compliance with new temperature control guidelines, HACCP and HARPC requirements, and select components of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA).

All of these new regulations are fairly complex and usually amended, expanded, or completely changed every few years. And while all intentions are good (people's lives are at stake, after all), the new regulations have dramatically increased the time, cost, and anxiety that goes along with maintaining food safety compliance. In fact, many new regulations require constant proof

of compliance, particularly FSMA's Foreign Supplier Verification Program (FSVP) and Sanitary Transport of Human Food Final Rule. As a result, many restaurants are turning to regular, ongoing internal audits in an attempt to remain compliant at all times, and "audit-ready" at the drop of a hat.

Continuous internal audits are helping

Every time a new food safety regulation is enacted, a new set of time-consuming procedures and compliances comes along with it. All of these new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Prerequisite Programs (PRPs) are adding up, driving many restaurants to realize that they can no longer afford to wait until the eleventh hour to prepare for an upcoming third party assessment. There's just too much risk involved.

Is the sign installed correctly? Is the grass cut? Are the bathrooms clean? Is the chicken at the right temperature? What about allergens? Are they being handled correctly? Is there a pest problem to worry about? When was the last time somebody looked at the ice maker?

Today's regulations are so broad and detailed that it's nearly impossible to remain compliant if you're not ahead of the game. So instead of running around trying to find and fix problems at the last minute, more and more restaurants are performing ongoing internal audits to review all aspects of store operations on a regular basis.

In the end, nothing drives food safety and continuous improvement like an internal audit. There's more pressure for employees to remain compliant if regular audits are part of their day-to-day job. Plus, a good internal audit program ensures you're "audit-ready" if and when the dreaded federal review rears its ugly head.

Let's take a look at the benefits of Continuous Internal Audits.

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Top 5 benefits of Continuous Internal Audits

1 Find and fix problems faster

Internal audits often reveal issues before they become even bigger problems (*i.e. Is that broken tile going to get worse and hurt someone?*) Plus, when you identify nonconformances on your own, you have time to make adjustments, changes, and course-corrections before a federal inspection reveals them and you're hit with a hefty fine...or even worse, somebody gets injured or sick.

2 Ensure quality

Regular auditing gives you a better idea of whether or not employees are following your documented processes, and whether or not they're preparing and serving food in a way that meets regulatory standards. Are they performing practices right? Are they handling foods correctly? Are the necessary forms and checklists getting completed accurately and completely? All of this can be verified and confirmed when safety operations are managed with the right mobile software.

3 Establish and maintain accountability

You have processes and procedures in place for a reason. And while we'd all love to believe that all of our employees are doing everything they should be doing at all times, ongoing auditing takes any question out of the equation. Continuous audits can tell you who did what, when, and how - and if anything goes wrong - you can hold the right party responsible for their actions.

4 Drive operational efficiency

By habitually monitoring processes and procedures, you'll discover whether operations are running as expected, whether employees are executing procedures as planned, and whether they're filling out the proper paperwork to document completed tasks. From there, you can make tweaks and adjustments to make sure your set procedures are driving efficiencies and improvements.

5 Continuous audits = continuous improvements

Continuous auditing generates a lot of data. And when you take the time to analyze this data, you'll gain a better understanding of whether things are getting better or worse over time. If things aren't getting any better, you can use the data to identify trends and make smart, incremental changes on an ongoing basis until you're running like a well-oiled machine.

Check out the office at almost any restaurant, and you'll notice the same thing: dead trees as far as the eye can see.

Paper is a problem

By now, we all know that continuous audits are great...in theory. But when put into practice, many restaurants still don't have the technology to manage all the paperwork, let alone implement the necessary CAPA quickly enough to make a real difference.

The problem is that too many restaurants are still using paper – serious amounts of paper. Check out the office at almost any restaurant, and you'll notice the same thing: an overwhelmed employee trying to manage multiple of checklists, forms, and log books.

Paper is a problem for many reasons:

1. Managing heaps of papers can be messy and overwhelming.
2. Paper requires manual data entry, which can lead to errors.
3. Paper is frequently gets lost or accidentally destroyed.

And spreadsheets? [Don't get us started on spreadsheets.](#)

Mobile software is helping forward-thinking restaurants implement and manage a food safety program with automated measures across all touchpoints.

Mobile Technology is changing the game

Many of today's leading restaurants are rapidly moving away from paper reports and turning to mobile technology to solve their operational problems. They're using apps and software to perform regular audits and inspections. They're abandoning paper and storing data in the cloud to streamline food safety processes. They're also capturing critical information, managing tasks, and automating notifications, alerts, and maintenance requests. Many are even leveraging the data they gather to make more informed decisions, and using dashboards to analyze trends across multiple locations.

Mobile software is helping these forward-thinking restaurants implement and manage a food safety program with automated measures across all touchpoints. But before you dive in right away and buy, you'll want to do your research to make sure you're getting what you need. Because whether you're performing an operational audit, a food safety inspection, or a brand compliance audit (or all three), you want to be sure that the mobile software you choose offers the features and functionality you need to ensure ongoing compliance at your unique operation.

Mobile software use cases

Operational Audits

Continuous auditing requires a lot of operational audits and action plans. Mobile audits allow you to pre-populate fields and set individual tasks, group tasks, due dates, and criticality levels. These features, combined with automated notifications and alerts, make task delegation easier to manage, while bringing a total accountability to your operations.

Since you'll be using a mobile technology for your audits, look for software that takes advantage of your device's built-in camera and GPS. GPS coordinates, married with time and date stamping, give you solid evidence for documenting problems or verifying compliance. And with the right software, you can upload your pictures directly to your forms – even drawn on them with your finger or stylus to point out compliances and abnormalities.

Most importantly, look for the ability to perform audits while offline. Restaurant Wi-Fi can be spotty, and you don't want to have to start all over again if a connectivity interruption cuts you off mid-audit.

Features to Look For



Food Safety Inspections

Food safety inspections are critical to keeping consumers healthy and holding staff and vendors accountable for maintaining your high safety standards.

Like operational audits, food safety inspections can be greatly improved with mobile devices. Built-in cameras, for example, can be very useful. Not only can you use photo documentation to verify compliance, but pictures of violations can also be embedded into sections of your forms. Again, you want the ability to easily mark-up the photos to use in future training purposes.

Field validation is another important feature to consider when reviewing food safety systems. After all, the key to driving continuous improvement lies in your ability to gather accurate data. For example, let's say someone is checking the temperature of cooked chicken. Their review verifies that it's set to 160 degrees. But instead of entering 160 degrees, they accidentally enter 16 degrees. With field validation, the forms are smart enough to display a warning message saying that the data being entered is outside of the acceptable range.

But what if the chicken really is 16 degrees? In situations like these, they'll want to kick off an action plan that addresses this problem immediately. With the right software, they can instantly alert the appropriate personnel of the failing criteria and automatically generate a CAPA to fix the problem...and make sure it doesn't happen again.

Let's say they don't have mobile technology, and they enter incorrect or incomplete information about chicken temperature on a paper form. The error might not be noticed until the end of the day or shift, which in many cases is much too late; too many people will have already been put at risk.

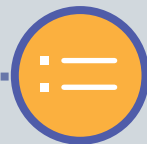
Features to Look For



*Field
validation*



*Photo upload
and markup*



*Automated
Action Plans*



*Alerts and
notifications*

Brand Compliance Audits

Your marketing department might *think* they know how your brand is represented in the marketplace, but unless you're auditing it on a regular basis you can never really be sure that each location is living up to your unique positioning.

Is each store offering the same promotional offers? Is their pricing in-line with expectations? What about signage? Is everything current and properly installed? Are employees greeting customers correctly?

For example, when customers enter a Moe's Southwest Grill, they're greeted with an enthusiastic "Welcome to Moe's!" from the staff of the pop-culture restaurant where it's "cool to be you, even if you're not cool".

Maintaining brand consistency like this takes an ongoing commitment to internal auditing. It also takes the right technology. Because just like any other audit, brand compliance audits generate a ton of paper. They also generate valuable data that you can use to compare the success of your brand initiatives from store to store – and even determine how they affect same store sales.

At the first sign of any problem, you're going to want your technology to let you immediately notify the appropriate stakeholders while automatically kicking off action plans for CAPA. So look for mobile food safety software with those capabilities built-in. You're also going to want to document the time and details for all infractions, which is where your camera and GPS integration will come in most handy.

Features to Look For



*Photo upload
and markup*



*Automated
Action Plans*



*Alerts and
notifications*

8 Benefits of Mobile Software for Restaurant Food Safety

In addition to helping you perform continuous audits to find and fix problems faster, mobile food safety software can also help you do a number of other very helpful things that will make your job easier. Here are eight we think you'll like most.

1 Be "Audit-ready" at all Times

We discussed how a growing number of standards and requirements (FSMA, HACPP, GFSI, etc.) is generating so much paper that the record keeping process has become a managerial nightmare. In fact, things are now so bad that many restaurants have even had operations suspended for not having the necessary documentation available. After all, as far as an auditor knows, if it isn't documented, you didn't do it. With the right mobile software, however, you can quickly prove compliance by instantly pulling up the appropriate forms and documentation for any auditor or consumer to review.

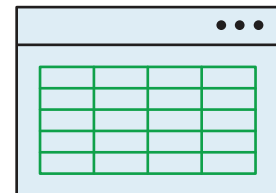


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2 Eliminate Redundant Work

Paper-based audits often result in a large amount of redundant manual data entry. After all, each form is going to require restaurant details, time and date information, and notes highlighting the successes and failures of each review.

With mobile software, you'll no longer have to fill out basic information (all of that is pre-filled for you). Even better, you'll no longer have to go back to your office to type everything up, or re-enter it into a spreadsheet. Best of all, you'll have a digital record of everything, which can be made available immediately to stakeholders, regulatory auditors, and consumers.



Leadership can view a dashboard to see how each individual store is performing from a high level.

3 Gain Real-time Visibility Across all Stores

Restaurants often have multiple locations, which means they have many different employees performing paper-based food safety initiatives in their own unique way. Not only does this cause inconsistencies, but without a baseline to work from, it can be very difficult to measure successes and failures across stores.

When each location is using the same mobile software, however, leadership can view a dashboard to see how each individual store is performing from a high level. They can track performance by location, identify trends and inconsistencies, and even provide feedback to multiple locations or individual restaurants to help standardize food safety operations.

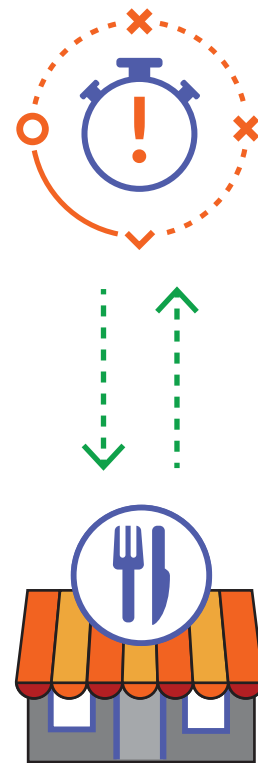
4 Fix Problems faster with Automated CAPA

Many restaurants still manage their Corrective and Preventative Actions (CAPA) with paper, spreadsheets, and various other homegrown solutions that involve carrier pigeons and tin can telephones.

But the key to CAPA is speed and accuracy. Time is of the essence when it comes to food safety, so you need to get things fixed as soon as possible...and prevent problems from happening again. After all, if a piece of equipment is malfunctioning or if employees aren't following food safety procedures, what's more important than getting that corrected right away and making sure it doesn't happen again?

Rather than saying "You're doing it wrong!" the right software can arm you with the information you need explain why and how they're doing it wrong. For example, when an issue arises and needs to be corrected, you can leverage your mobile software to create a learning experience for your workers. You can show them the relevant compliance recommendations directly on your mobile device, and educate them on the proper actions to take to make sure the problem doesn't happen again.

Automation, a major benefit of any software, makes the CAPA process even more effective. Automated CAPAs can trigger activities based on a particular entry, response, or incident. Based on the information submitted in a form, the software automatically kicks off the appropriate action plans, notifications, maintenance requests, or requests for audits or re-inspections. At the same time, when violations are found, submitted forms can automatically route reports or alerts to the right people in and outside of your company for follow-up or review. Simply put, you can automate almost everything...and still have access while offline.



Getting a constant pulse on how your safety initiatives are working at each regional store.

5 Mitigate Risk

Remember the 2015 outbreak we discussed earlier? That restaurant is living proof that safety issues present a huge risk to the brand perception and financial well-being of any restaurant. Not only were they forced to shut down several locations for many days, the PR disaster that ensued cost them a good deal of money in lost revenue and fees. They've also been named in countless lawsuits, including one by a group of their own investors. The true financial impact of the outbreak won't be known for some time, but needless to say it will be many years before their reputation is back to where it once was.

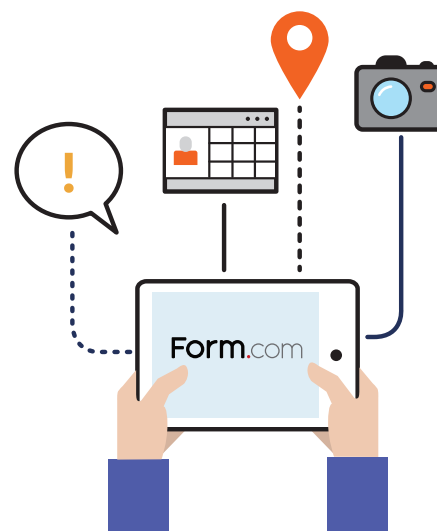
Situations like these can be avoided when you perform continuous audits to find and fix problems on a regular basis - before an outbreak occurs. And if something does happen and someone does get sick, mobile devices make it easy to quickly set off timely CAPAs to help prevent any widespread incidents from occurring, and putting your restaurant's name in the news for all the wrong reasons.



6 Leverage Data to Make Informed Decisions

When you take the time to analyze the information you collect every day, you can get a good understanding of any problems that are happening at ground level, while getting a constant pulse on how things are working at each regional store.

Data analysis can help you quickly understand if things are getting better or worse by region, franchise group, management team, etc. With the right data and a willingness to learn from it, you can start generating the kinds of thoughts and conversations where real learning can happen. Over time, this can spark better ideas, smarter decisions, and ultimately lead you down a path towards continuous improvement.



7 Drive Continuous Improvement

Any well-run business strives to maintain continuous improvement in the workplace. Because just like anything else in life, if you're not always getting better, you're probably getting worse.

Continuous improvement is one of the most important components of any food safety plan. It refers to the

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ongoing process of getting better over time by making incremental improvements on a regular basis. But remember, demonstrating continuous improvement takes patience, flexibility, and a deep commitment to regular internal auditing.

8 Demonstrate ROI

The continuous audits, mobile software, and mobile devices discussed in this paper will require an investment, which will need to be justified to higher-ups. Because while food safety is 99.99% about consumer health, the bottom line is still the bottom line. So you'll need to make a case for implementing a safety initiative based on mobile technology.

In addition to helping you avoid outbreaks (which alone lead to PR disasters and endless lawsuits that can cost you hundreds of millions of dollars), mobile software reduces the time it takes to fix problems by days, even weeks. That time equals money. And as we discussed earlier, the right mobile software can help you perform 3 types of audits: operational, food safety, and brand compliance. So it's almost like getting 3 products in one.

With mobile software and continuous auditing, you can also make sure that food is being prepared properly and according to SOPs and PRPs. This will lead to fewer customer rejections and less waste from improperly prepared meals.

Finally, when you combine all the time you save by automating tasks and CAPAs across all of your stores with the money you save in fines for nonconformances, you can easily prove that the efficiency gained across your entire operation will vastly outweigh the upfront investment.

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A Few Parting Words

Like an earthquake, an outbreak of foodborne illness can't be predicted. But when one does strike, the impact can be devastating. Stores can be forced to close, leading to lost productivity and reduced revenue. Investors can get worried, and your stock can plummet before you've had a chance to make improvements. Worst of all, customers can get sick (sometimes even die).

In this time of heightened consumer awareness, social media is shining a giant spotlight on the perils of serving tainted food – and customers are demanding accountability. To get ahead of the game, many leading restaurants are turning to technology, particularly mobile food safety software as a way to streamline operations and increase visibility.

You can do a lot of great things for your food safety initiatives when you have the right mobile form software or app. You can completely centralize, manage, and automate your auditing and inspection processes. You can store, access, and search information from several locations in one place. You can pull up valuable things like historical data, pictures, and documentation for everything SOPs and SSOPs to PRPs and GMPs. But most importantly, you can take the steps needed to avoid being responsible for the next big outbreak.



1. <https://www.cdc.gov/features/foodborne-diseases-data/>





Got questions? We can help!

Form.com is a flexible platform designed to take time-consuming procedures done on paper and spreadsheets and turn them into user-friendly forms. Our mobile and offline app allows you to access and complete forms from anywhere, even while offline, and our team of experts will work with you every step of the way to create your ideal solution.

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