



AI clocks in: how bots are streamlining restaurant operations

Primanti Brothers modernizes back-office processes with an RPA bot

by Brittany King

4-minute read

The restaurant business is rapidly changing, and the advancement of technology is playing an integral role in its modernization. Recently, the emergence of AI is delivering virtually limitless potential to the foodservice field, but don't expect to see an all-robot staff operating the grill and mixing drinks the next time you dine out—not yet, at least.



Longtime restaurant chain Primanti Brothers is no stranger to evolving with the times. For over 89 years, the iconic Pittsburgh-based chain has been doing everything right in terms of innovation, including offering French fries and coleslaw in its signature sandwiches. However, the company emerged from the COVID-19 crisis, looked at

its service model for back-of-house operations, and realized its regional management team was inefficiently tasked with manual reporting processes.

“It was a very hectic year for us. As many in the restaurant industry would say, 2020 – 2021 was not an easy time.

Coming out of the Covid pandemic, a lot was happening with decisions for new products and projects,” explains Caitlin Stritmatter, Director of Financial Planning & Analysis at Primanti Bros. “We started to think, ‘Do we need to hire a person in every restaurant just to do the paperwork and the administrative side of stuff? There has to be a better way.’ We needed a more efficient way to handle our reporting.”

Primanti Bros. wanted to improve its repetitive office processes by consolidating the manual work required to generate the daily sales and labor reports. Looking closely at the situation, the company needed a group of eight regional managers to pull daily sales reports for five locations each, taking at least 45 minutes per person to generate 40 reports by 10 AM each day, including weekends and holidays. The restaurant chain realized that automating such



processes using AI would save on time and operational costs.

“You only have so much time every day before you start running the restaurant. You can get so bogged down in the process of copying, pasting, filling out

and double-checking a spreadsheet, when you should be focused on actually looking at the numbers and what they’re saying,” says Stritmatter. “So, we wanted to take the busy-work out of the process to free up time for thought and planning.”

Automating mundane tasks

Process automation poses an array of challenges for companies, but Primanti Bros. met this challenge head-on. Working with IBM and IBM Business Partner Salient Process, Inc., a full-service process automation firm, Primanti Bros. mapped out a digital modernization plan that would use AI for its finance department. Through analyzing various software technologies, the Financial Planning and Analysis team found [IBM® Robotic Process Automation \(RPA\)](#) to deliver the highest return on investment (ROI) for automation use cases.

Jimmy Hewitt, Senior Automation Advisor at Salient Process, says: “I really like two



things about this specific automation technology. First is that because it takes the bot no time at all to do work that took humans 2,000 hours per year to do, it quite literally gives you the gift of time. They say you can't buy time. I

say, yes you can! Second is how low the barrier to entry is for this capability.”

RPA provides an intuitive user interface, allowing almost anyone to build a bot to perform simple automated tasks. The

IBM RPA bot is incredibly flexible. It can work across multiple platforms and systems to collect scattered information using AI. Primanti Bros. relies on IBM RPA technology to turn daily sales and labor reporting into a hands-free task with less room for error.

Within two weeks, the new solution was implemented. Three months

later, Primanti Bros. reported that it had already paid for itself. Instead of sitting behind a desk, Primanti's regional managers can now spend more time focusing on providing the best experience to their "fans" (their customers). With access to real-time numbers and data, the management team can quickly compare the trends and begin planning for the day.

"One of our regional managers said what a relief it is to not only have these reports already done but to know they're accurate. Nobody else went in and mistakenly entered the wrong number," adds Stritmatter. "As a data person, that puts me at ease. It's error-free and I know they're looking at the right stuff."

“There’s such a limited amount of time when it comes to running a restaurant that wasting it on a redundant process is the last thing you want to do.”

The three-minute bot

Primanti Bros. now completes daily sales and labor reporting in record time. Instead of eight managers each spending 45 minutes per day on the task, the RPA bot takes care of it in three minutes. It saves management over 2,000 hours annually, with Primanti Bros. seeing a cost savings of USD 84,000.

As the restaurant moves toward more technology, the future of its machine learning and AI is uncapped. After seeing the automation bot's capabilities, other departments within Primanti Bros. have submitted requests to apply it to their own reporting needs.

"We are also working on mapping out requests for the accounting and IT



department. There could be hundreds of reports we can automate when it's all said and done, but we are prioritizing what will have the biggest impact," explains Stritmatter. "We have a long-term plan for continued growth by opening more restaurant locations. Looking down the road, we hope to get to a point where we need to hire someone internal just to manage our automations—past, present and future. There's a lot of room to grow and we have no plans to slow down. The bot will be vital in keeping our business model scalable."

“Selecting the IBM Robotic Process Automation solution was a no-brainer. This isn't just a product that helps the corporate office; it's also helping operations and the restaurant managers.”

Caitlin Stritmatter, Director of Financial Planning & Analysis, Primanti Brothers



About Primanti Brothers

[Primanti Bros.](#) (external link), an iconic sandwich shop chain, was founded in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by Joe Primanti and his brothers in 1933. The famous chain is known for its signature sandwich consisting of grilled meat, melted cheese, coleslaw, tomato and French fries between two slices of Italian bread.

Solution component

- IBM® Robotic Process Automation



About Salient Process, Inc.

Having doubled in size over the last year, US-based [Salient Process](#) (external link) is an IBM Business Partner and the leading hyperautomation services and solutions provider. Salient specializes in Process Mapping, Mining and Analysis, Robotic Process Automation, Business Process Management (BPM), Business Rules Management (Decision) and Automation Solutions, and maintains a healthy practice of on shore, near shore, and offshore implementation consultants.