



Feeding on a need for speed, Papa John's rolls out 10-minute pizzas

By: Bruce Horovitz, April 25, 2006

The fast in fast food is about to take on frantic new meaning: the 10-minute pizza.

Papa John's today will announce head-spinning plans to roll out what it claims will be the fastest made-to-order pizza in America. If all goes as planned, the No. 3 chain would eventually become the first national pizza retailer to promise fresh pizzas in 10 minutes - - or less.

It's dubbed: Papa's 10 Minute Carry-out Customer Guarantee. In limited test markets, the guarantee had been: if the pizza doesn't arrive in 10 minutes or less, it's free. Papa John's test stores are missing the 10-minute mark less than 1% of the time, the company says.

Over the next two years, Papa John's will spend \$20 million to roll out 1,500 ovens with higher air velocity and higher-speed burners in about 750 stores. That will cut pizza cooking time from six minutes to four minutes at about one-third of the chain's 2,500 stores.

The 10-minute guarantee will apply only to carry-out orders at lunch time. That's when the clock is ticking loudest for many consumers. And it's when business is typically lightest for pizza sellers.

"This will put us in line to compete with other fast feeders like Wendy's," says Tim O'Hern, senior vice president of development at Papa John's. "Ten minutes is about the time people spend waiting in line at the drive-through window."

Behind Papa John's strategy: a time-strapped society bent on eating, playing and living fast. A nation of consumers that demand faster computers is increasingly impatient with slow service for fast food.

"People are time-starved at lunch," says Bob Sandelman, an industry consultant. "In 10 minutes, you can check your e-mails or return a phone call. This could be a big competitive advantage."

Little Caesar's sells Hot-N-Ready pizzas that are immediately available but are not made-to-order.

Papa John's 10-minute guarantee has risks. If consumers taste a quality lapse, Sandelman warns, the costly effort could implode.

That won't happen, O'Hern says. Customers tasted no quality decline in test stores in Louisville, Philadelphia and Dallas. "Quality is what we've built this brand on," he says.

Pizza Hut says it has no plans to cut its pizza-making time. "In our experience, freshly baked, high-quality pizza takes more than four minutes. And we think it's worth waiting for," says Jennifer Little, a spokeswoman.