White Spot's recipe for growth and cloud success

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Overview

In business since 1928, the chain has continuously modernized its operations and infrastructure to adapt to change, pursue expansion in Canada and internationally and generally thrive in the thin-margin, highly competitive restaurant sector.

Vancouver based White Spot Hospitality operates 64 full service White Spot restaurants in Canada along with 70 Triple O's restaurants, their premium quick service brand in Canada and Hong Kong.

In business since 1928, the chain has continuously modernized its operations and infrastructure to adapt to change, pursue expansion in Canada and internationally and generally thrive in the thin-margin, highly competitive restaurant sector. A strategic focus on IT has been instrumental to White Spot's sustained success — and as one of its partners beginning in 2017, Softchoice has helped White Spot translate this technology vision into reality, guiding it through critical initiatives including a major network architecture upgrade.

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Delivering the restaurant-in-a-box

Prior to partnering with Softchoice, White Spot had worked with other managed service providers but felt that these vendors were not equipped for the task of helping it pursue true digital transformation.

More specifically, White Spot sought to create a scalable "restaurant-in-a-box" paradigm, through which each of its locations could be connected via a uniform "cookie-cutter" configuration to a secure, reliable and redundant network that would, in turn, support its technology projects.

Before it could accomplish this goal, White Spot needed modernized infrastructure that would enable it to harness the full power of these technologies. Migration to a new office, one without the legacy network infrastructure, was one of several important pieces of this puzzle. The new site needed to reinforce White Spot's operations in the cloud, especially its implementation of cloud-based point-of-sale (POS) terminals integrated with third-party services, via better networking that would not unexpectedly go down.

"We chose Softchoice because we believed that their team would be the ones to help us grow and get to that next level," explained Shauna Begley, former Vice President of IT at White Spot. "We had some big projects in the pipeline, including the move to the new office. Although we were bringing a few of our existing servers with us, everything else — the networks, cameras, AV equipment, etc. — was going to be built from scratch, and so we needed a proactive partner who could take charge."

For White Spot, Softchoice met three key criteria:

- Clear, consistent communications about plans and projects.

- A proven record of partnership with other organizations.

- An overall commitment to long-term customer success.

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With Softchoice's guidance, White Spot created a network architecture that could finally support its overall strategic vision. The end result was a restaurant-in-a-box model, one that could be scaled to each existing and planned White Spot and Triple O's restaurant, enabling them to connect to the same proven network from anywhere. Setting up a site now takes only a few hours from start to finish.

"Softchoice was eager and confident to help manage our digital transformation journey," said Begley. "Their team commenced work right away and did not require any hand-holding from us. Instead, they were always proactively coming up with creative solutions to our problems."

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Catering to flexibility

Ultimately, White Spot followed Softchoice's suggestions and upgraded its software. Softchoice also helped White Spot review its licensing requirement to ensure all the right agreements were in place within its Microsoft EA.

The Softchoice partnership set White Spot up for sustainable success beyond the original scope of their work together.

For instance, in addition to assisting with the network architecture transformation, Softchoice also conducted an audit of White Spot's Microsoft Office 365 implementation upon request, to ensure it met applicable security requirements and would remain suitable for future use.

While Softchoice had not previously managed Office 365 for White Spot, it worked earnestly on this project, looking for any possible vulnerabilities and making relevant recommendations along the way. Ultimately, White Spot followed Softchoice's suggestions and upgraded its software. Softchoice also helped White Spot review its licensing requirement to ensure all the right agreements were in place within its Microsoft EA.

These upgrades have given White Spot extra flexibility that has been invaluable as it has pursued additional strategic initiatives and navigated fresh challenges, including the rollout of what it calls the "Smart Kitchen," in which touch screens replace called out orders from cooks. Plus, the nimble White Spot response to the COVID-19 pandemic was more straightforward as a result of its IT architecture overhaul and upgraded managed services.

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Remaining resilient in the face of COVID-19

"Softchoice has been a key source of support ever since our partnership began, not only for these types of IT initiatives but also for our broader efforts to serve our guests and give back to our community, too."

— Shauna Begley, former Vice President of IT at White Spot

COVID-19 was profoundly disruptive for White Spot, as it was for the entire restaurant industry. White Spot temporarily closed a handful of restaurants and had to rapidly pivot from a predominantly dine-in business to one oriented around takeout and delivery:

- Pre-coronavirus, 85% of White Spot's sales were from dine-in guests and the rest from to-go orders placed via phone or online.

- Once COVID-19 struck, these numbers drastically changed, with 75% of orders now coming from takeout and 25% from delivery customers.

- White Spot was able to maintain 60% of its guest traffic even amid the pandemic, thanks to its rapid transition to a new mode of operations.

How did White Spot's IT investments enable it to become a takeout-first business on such a short time?

With a reliable network and secure applications already in place, the White Spot team, led by Begley, were able to move quickly to bolster their online ordering systems, scale their web server capacity, perform stress testing and re-optimize the physical layouts of their restaurants.

Some of White Spot's IT systems are still hard-coded, but it is moving toward a more flexible infrastructure that supports greater operational agility. Overall, the partnership with Softchoice combined with adept leadership left White Spot well-prepared, both technologically and operationally, for even the major shocks of COVID-19.

"We made our head office more remote-friendly years ago," said Begley. "That foresight, along with our new and more reliable network architecture, set us up well when COVID hit. Softchoice has been a key source of support ever since our partnership began, not only for these types of IT initiatives but also for our broader efforts to serve our guests and give back to our community, too."

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About White Spot Hospitality

The Client

White Spot is a restaurant chain, founded in 1928 and is currently based in Vancouver, British Columbia. It operates more than 100 full-service White Spot and quick-service Triple O's locations across Canada and Hong Kong.

The Ask

White Spot wanted to implement a more dependable network architecture that could support future cloud-based POS systems as well as its broader vision of a "restaurant-in-a-box" IT model that could be scaled across all of its sites. To do so, it needed to complete its head office migration and ensure the reliability and security of its networks, applications and infrastructure.

The Softchoice Value

Softchoice supported White Spot's modernization and growth plans, by offering expert guidance and recommendations on everything from the design of its network architecture to the security of its Office 365 implementation.

Headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia, White Spot is Canada's longest-running restaurant chain.

Founded in 1928, when Nat Bailey launched Canada's first drive-in restaurant at Granville and 67th, the 92-year-young chain now sees more than 17 million guests annually at 134 White Spot and Triple O's (their premium quick service restaurants) throughout B.C., Alberta, Asia and soon, Ontario.

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