



Facility Manager Project Profile

How a Panera Facilities Director managed a corporate-wide remodel

Welcome to FM Project Profile, an interview-style series in which a restaurateur spotlights a major facilities project. By discussing one of their most memorable facilities jobs, our members hope to share insight and inspiration. This month's profile comes from Christopher Skiles, Director of Facilities at Panera Bread, LLC.

Briefly, what is the overall project scope for the Panera 2.0 Reboot? The scope of work for the facilities and remodel group is the installation of ordering kiosks, an order status screen for customers to know when their orders will be ready and the construction of a waiting area with comfortable benches. In some cases, we'll be adding a millwork wrap around our noisy barista station, rearranging our production line to allow all items in a customer order (except cold breakfast items) to be picked up at one location, installing additional production capacity by improving the space efficiency, and rebalancing and installing additional electrical capacity for the new equipment. This is all in an effort to remove the friction points for our customers.

What tasks are your team responsible for? Over the last 3 years, facilities has been working on various stages of rearranging and increasing the production systems, as well as increasing the electrical capacity of specific cafes.

What is the general scope of work for your project? Relocating and replacing fixtures and equipment (sometimes replacing built-in fixtures and installing flooring), production monitors, outlets and mechanical systems, and installing additional millwork to increase the line spacing.

How many locations will be remodeled? We have worked on all 900+ company locations with some portion of the project, but not all will receive everything. Each café layout will be evaluated, and then we create a scope of work that will be implemented.

When did this project start, and what is the estimated completion date? It started in 2012, and it will be an ongoing effort.

How many have been completed? We have completed several phases of the plan and continue to improve each café.

How long does it take to retrofit one restaurant?
It depends on the scope of work, but typically one to three nights.

Are the stores closed during the back-of-the-house remodel?
No, the work is performed at night so the café remains open.

In general, how many stores are completed every month?
It depends on the phase of the work but as many as 150 per month.

How many different internal departments are involved with this company-wide rollout?
For the construction phases, four departments, but the program is very large and is supported through all departments to go live.

How many people on your team are coordinating the work?
Three facilities managers are managing various phases of the roll outs.

The projects are challenging, and it is amazing how the facilities team steps up to cover these projects and still manage their regular job requirements.

How many general contractors are being utilized?

At least three general contractors, one roll-out vendor, one data services contractor and one national electrical contractor.

What other vendors are being used, i.e., distribution companies, equipment and cabinet manufacturers, etc.? Two millwork vendors, one national distribution company (a RFMA member) and two equipment suppliers.

Was there any permitting required? In some jurisdictions, building permits are necessary, but generally trade permits are sufficient.

What are a few of the hidden issues encountered during the rollout? Not having electrical capacity available in a building was the worst. It required rethinking the whole plan, cutting back on amperage and coordinating with our electrical contractor through load testing.

There were also a few inspection challenges where the facility managers have had to walk the health and building inspectors through the scope of work in order to avoid large permit delays. Of course, there are the occasional subcontractor quality issues, which we rely heavily on the professionalism of our contractors to resolve.

How is restaurant operations notified of the construction schedule?

This is the most important part of the process. Clear communication of each individual scope of work has to be relayed through several avenues of communication with various degrees of detail, depending on the level of operation leadership. We have found that it works best to hold several online presentations for each level of operational leadership, followed up with the contractor communicating with the café management multiple times to confirm scope and construction schedule. We follow up with an IVR survey the day following the project completion.

How are they trained for the new equipment and procedures?

The construction schedule is set to allow our operations and learning departments plenty of time to cascade the training on the equipment and processes.

What are your main “takeaways”? The projects are challenging, and it is amazing how the facilities team steps up to cover these projects and still manage their regular job requirements.