

IHOP units test iPod as a language teaching tool

By Dina Berta

DALLAS — IHOP cook Rafael Cardena is inspiring envy among his co-workers when he puts on ear plugs and starts spinning the dial on his video iPod.

Cardena, a native of Mexico, is not listening to music, but an English language program to help him communicate better on the job. But his co-workers still can't wait for their turn with the handheld device.

IHOP — one of the 44 restaurants operated by Dallas-based franchisee ACG Texas LLC — is participating in a test to see how well the iPod can help its Spanish-speaking employees learn English and its English-speaking employees learn Spanish.

Since Apple Computer released the video iPod in October 2005, businesses have seized upon the palm-size machine to use as an employee training tool because of its mobility, its information capacity and its ability to hold the interest of today's young adults, most of whom have grown up with computers and video games. Those attributes make it ideal for the restaurant industry, operators and training consultants said.

"This can be a fantastic training tool," said Robert Tomlinson, senior vice president of operations for ACG Texas.

The franchise company agreed to pilot the program — Language for Life, or La Lengua de la Vida — for franchisor IHOP Corp., based in Glendale, Calif., which will determine whether to roll it out to more stores, Tomlinson said.

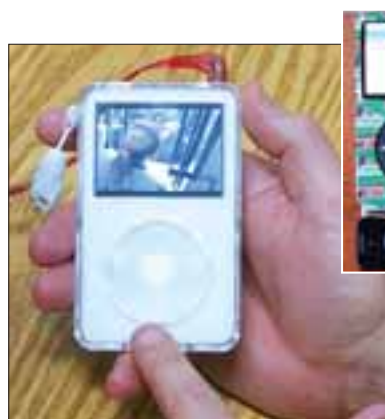
ACG has two executives using the iPod to learn Spanish, while a couple of stores are allowing Spanish-speaking employees to use it to help them improve their English.

Multimedia consultant TJ Schier of Flower Mound, Texas, who launched a new business, PodTraining, earlier this year, developed the program. He worked with human resources consultant Catherine Heston, of HR Trends in Dallas, who wrote a curriculum focused on the work-specific language used in restaurants.

A workbook and flash cards accompany the video loaded on the iPod. An employee will watch a video clip and write in the workbook. The iPod also has a microphone so an employee can practice speaking the English or Spanish words.

"With the iPod, you can create customized training content for customers," Schier said. "If they already have an iPod, it's an easy add on. If they are doing other types of training, it's easy to add on the language program. They can leverage as much content as possible and not have to get another device for a language course."

Gaddis Rathel, field-training manager for ACG Texas, listens to Spanish instruction on an iPod on his way to the office or to the restaurants. "It's complete enough and mobile enough that if you have a busy schedule, you still benefit from



The Language for Life program helps users improve their English or Spanish skills with video clips that focus on restaurant work-specific language.



it," Rathel said. "I don't have the time to take a class."

Learning Spanish, however, would help him when he leads training sessions with Spanish-speaking employees.

"Some are fluent in both languages, but not all [of the employees]," Rathel said. "It helps to be able to translate certain words, and when they are describing something, it's not always in English, but I can understand what they are telling me, and I can communicate back to them."

Many of the Spanish-speaking employees working with Cardena also are eager to improve their English, said the restaurant's general manager, Francisco Jaramillo, who is bilingual.

"[Employees] want to be promoted, and they see this as a way to start," Jaramillo said. "I also have servers who want to learn more Spanish. About 45 percent of our customers speak Spanish, so this will be beneficial for everyone." ■

dberta@nrm.com

Q&A

Teaching culinary skills with a side of life

Success has eluded most of the young students who enroll in Life's Kitchen, a culinary arts school in Boise, Idaho. Some are high school dropouts, single parents, recovering drug addicts or juvenile delinquents. However, when they come to class and put on their white chefs' coats, something happens, said Rouchelle Abrahamson, executive director of the nonprofit program. Since its inception three years ago, Life's Kitchen has graduated more than 90 students from its 16-week program. Ninety percent of the graduates found jobs in foodservice. Classes are small — no more than 10 students, who are between the ages of 16 and 20. Some are referred to the program by friends and family, others by social workers or the courts. Tuition is free. Half of Life's Kitchen's \$500,000 operating budget comes from fundraising and donations. The other half comes from its food operations — catering, a contract foodservice business, and an on-premise 48-seat cafe that is open to the public three days a week.



Rouchelle Abrahamson

Why is this part of the curriculum?

The culinary skills help them get their foot in the door to get the job, but the life skills allow them to keep the job. It helps them with communication and relationship building. Our goal is employability.

How hard is it for graduates to land jobs in the industry?

We have a great reputation in the community. My phone rings at least once a week from an employer looking for someone.

The students come in to the program angry, mad — one had been living under a bridge for four months. By the time they leave, there has been a significant change. If anything, they have more self-respect, and they know they are worth employing.

— Dina Berta

How does Life's Kitchen differ from regular culinary schools?

We don't just teach culinary skills. Every Monday there are all-day life skill classes. Right now the students are with two dietitians learning about nutrition. Planned Parenthood comes in and does a class on responsible sex education. An insurance agent will come in and talk about car insurance and deductibles. Bankers come in and talk about what checking accounts are all about. Someone from a debt reduction service comes in and talks about credit cards.

NEWS DIGESTS

NRA extends deadline for diversity awards

WASHINGTON — The National Restaurant Association has extended to Dec. 1 its deadline to submit nominations for its Faces of Diversity awards.

Two awards will be presented next spring. The American Dream award will be given to a successful entrepreneur of a diverse background. The Inspiration award will be presented to a restaurant company that has exhibited leadership and vision as an advocate of diversity and inclusion.

The NRA, in partnership with PepsiCo Foodservice, created the award initiative in May as a way to celebrate the restaurant industry's diversity and to inspire restaurateurs to embrace inclusion and expand their diversity efforts.

Applications for nominations are being accepted online at www.restaurant.org.

'What's next' website steers students to hospitality careers

CRANSTON, R.I. — A new website designed to promote hospitality and food-service careers among high school students called www.whatsnext4me.com recently launched.

The site was developed by the Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance, based here, in conjunction with Johnson & Wales University, and NIIT USA Inc., an international training and educational development organization. The U.S. Department of Labor provided funding for the site from a grant awarded under the President's High Growth Job Training Initiative and implemented by the Employment and Training Administration.

Survey: HR professionals involved in strategic planning

ALEXANDRIA, VA. — More than half of 427 human resources managers and executives reported that strategic planning has been added to their job duties, according to the 2006 Strategic HR Management Survey by the Society of Human Resource Management.

Seventy-five percent of HR professionals reported their departments make strategic contributions regarding retention programs, 70 percent reported contributions to work/life programs, 69 percent reported contributions to succession planning, and 65 percent reported contributions to health, safety and security programs.

Human resource items may be sent to Dina Berta, Nation's Restaurant News, 2266 Ivy St., Denver, CO 80207, or e-mailed to dberta@nrm.com. Or they may be faxed to (303) 333-1867.