

easy Log

Jacob's Coffee House: A system to meet the needs of a highly flexible workforce

Since it opened in 2011, Jacob's Coffee House in the centre of Bath, Somerset, has built up an enviable reputation for the quality of its food and friendly, efficient staff. But delicious cakes and a welcoming atmosphere only go so far when it comes to running a successful retail catering business. To turn a decent profit you also need to keep a tight hold on costs – especially when it comes to your workforce.

Flexible staff for a flexible business

The key is flexibility – and having the right tools to manage a complex staff schedule that changes by the day and even the hour, according to owner Jake Harris.



“We have 30-odd staff in a number of distinct roles, ranging from general assistant to barista/manager and baker,” he says. “Some are salaried, full-time positions, for instance the managers who run things day-to-day and co-ordinate the assistants, but a lot are part-time – people at university, college or school, for example, who want a Saturday job or one shift a week and extra hours in the holidays or fewer during exam periods.”

Far from being a problem, this constant turnover of workers suits Jacob's very well.

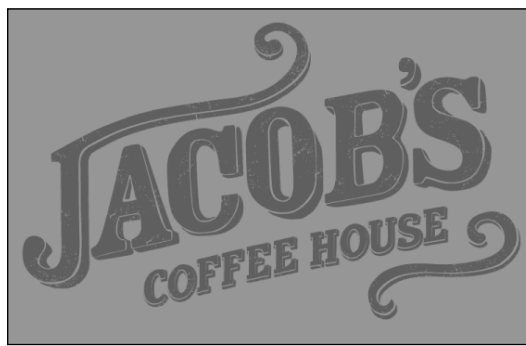
“The reality is that our working day is very flexible. We project our sales for each day but things don't always turn out as you'd expect. If we have a quiet day – perhaps because the weather changes or there's a problem with transport – we need to be able to respond to that,” Jake explains.

“Sometimes we need people to finish their shift early and sometimes we may be a bit busier and they'll need to stop on an extra hour. We might ask them to come in early, or do a double shift, or we may need to get an extra person in. So it's all about flexibility and it's a two-way thing.”

Keeping staffing levels within budget

Managing these constantly changing staffing levels is a difficult process that is further complicated by the need to balance projected turnover against wage costs.

“We operate on a daily budget, so we look at each day and work out when it's going to get busy, when it'll get quiet, when the peaks and lulls are likely to be, and how much money we are going to take,” Jake says.



“If we know we’re going to have a busy day we can afford to have more people in and on a quieter day, fewer people. So it’s not just about filling spaces or job functions but also about hitting the budget.”

In the past, Jake and his team created a schedule manually with the help of off-the-shelf budgeting software. But Jake eventually decided they needed a more professional, accurate and easy-to-use method of managing staff scheduling and attendance. After researching online and considering a number of options, he settled on easyLog’s e-Log rota creation software and tablet computer-based clocking-in system.

Because Jacob’s had very particular needs, Jake commissioned easyLog to customise the rota software so staffing costs could be taken into account as well as availability and coverage.

“We needed the scheduling tool to be able to tell us what we would expect to spend on wages so we could make the necessary adjustments, such as shaving half an hour here, trimming an hour a day there,” Jake explains.

“We also wanted a system that would manage an accurate database of employees’ details, such as date of birth, when they started, anniversary dates, pay rates, payroll and NI numbers and so on, as this was all done manually before.

“I didn’t really see anything on the market that provided everything I wanted other than totally bespoke systems, which were expensive. But easyLog had a fairly flexible system and were prepared to look at how they could make it work best for us. Rather than having to fit in with the system, it was more about tailoring it to how we run our business – and that was important to us.”

Greater clarity and accuracy

Jake now uses the e-Log software to generate a single weekly schedule, which is printed out and displayed for staff to see – although there is also an option to text the schedule to each employee.



“They just come in to check their shifts and how many hours they are working,” he says. “It’s really clearly laid out, which is essential because it means people don’t read the wrong times or someone else’s shift.”

Because their actual hours can, and often do, differ from this main schedule quite considerably, he uses the clocking-in system to provide a reliable record of his employees’ coming and goings when calculating pay.

“As you can imagine, with lots of very variable times, stopping, starting, breaks, no breaks, and so on, it’s very difficult to manage attendance accurately manually – impossible, really. That’s why the clocking-in software is important – because it calculates the hours, and our expenditure, correctly at the end of the week,” he says.

Online support and training

With a business that is operating from early morning to mid-evening, seven days a week, any disruption can be costly and inconvenient. But Jake says the implementation process went very smoothly, even though his IT knowledge was limited.

“In reality it was more of an online support and training process with the guys at easyLog,” he says. “Everything was installed and set up remotely and we had scheduled sessions over a couple of weeks, which were also done online, to introduce us to the software. You just dial in to the computer and look at the screen while you are having a conversation over the phone, so it couldn’t be easier.”

A welcoming approach

Jakes says that the new system is already making life easier in terms of saving time, increasing accuracy and controlling costs. And he confirms that he is more than happy with his choice of both product and supplier.

“The important thing from our perspective was that easyLog provided a welcoming approach to what we required,” he says.

“We took a fairly flexible system that didn’t originally include everything we wanted – mainly the budgeting tool – and they built that in. Of course it was chargeable but it was still a lot cheaper and less time consuming than creating a bespoke system from scratch – and it’s already proving a worthwhile investment.”

