

# Multi-Unit Golden Corral Franchise Boosts Sales With Drive-Thru and Expanded Off-Premises Service Powered by Digital Menu Boards

## BENEFITS



Drive-thru creates an entirely new 'meal period,' boosting sales



To-go room serves multiple points of order, saves on labor and food costs



120-second drive-thru service times match or beat typical QSR service times

## OVERVIEW

In the midst of unprecedented challenges for dine-in restaurants worldwide prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic, Golden Corral Buffet + Grill franchise Platinum Corral has a new lease on success. The Jacksonville, North Carolina Golden Corral significantly expanded its off-premises guest service options by launching a drive-thru and retrofitting its store with a "To-Go Room" that services all to-go channels. Both are powered by bright, engaging, centrally managed digital menu boards from Xenial. The restaurant is now equipped to further expand its digital service channels and serve guests regardless of possible future pandemic-imposed restrictions.

## THE BEGINNING

In many ways, Golden Corral Buffet + Grill has gone against the norm. While competitors in the buffet concept space have seen sales decline an average of **3.8%**, Golden Corral enjoyed modest growth in 2019: **0.8%**, according to Technomic. While trends have shown the dining public shying away from traditional buffets, with the sector averaging a **5.6%** decline between 2015 and 2020, Golden Corral has bucked the trend with **0.1%** sales growth during this same period.

Platinum Corral is the franchise organization led by Billy Sewell, son of one of the original investors in the Golden



**The Drive-thru Menu Board Outside The Jacksonville, NC Golden Corral Presents The Menu Using Bright, Easy-to-Read, Engaging Digital Imagery**

Corral buffet concept launched at Sewell's parents' dining room table in 1973.

While its dine-in endless buffet model continues to be the brand's main staple, many locations have begun offering takeout and delivery branded "Golden Corral On the Go." When Covid-19 forced dining rooms across the country to close in the Spring of 2020, dine-in sales were suddenly in jeopardy.

## THE TRANSFORMATION

Sewell and his Platinum Corral leadership team decided to fast-track expansion of off-premises dining options. Specifically, they envisioned a drive-thru and a remodeled interior that would house a 'to-go' room at the Jacksonville, North Carolina location near Camp Lejeune. When they asked their architect to suggest a restaurant technology partner to help bring the vision to reality, he recommended Xenial.

**"We selected Xenial based on its past successes partnering with well-known brands including Biscuitville, Bojangles and Taco Bell,"** says Billy Sewell, President of Platinum Corral. **"We were confident that Xenial would help us launch these new service channels quickly."**



## THE SOLUTION

Today, the epicenter for all Jacksonville Golden Corral On the Go orders is the new 'to-go room'. This room houses a walk-up counter where guests can place to-go orders. In addition, coworkers in this room prepare and fulfill all orders for all of these off-premises channels:

- **The single-lane drive-thru in the parking lot**
- **Orders placed by phone**
- **Catering**
- **Third-party delivery (through partnerships with UberEats, GrubHub, DoorDash, and ezCater).**

Walk-up guests order from four bright, engaging 49-inch digital menu boards suspended from the ceiling above the counter. In the drive-thru, guests make their selections from three 46-inch outdoor digital menu boards. During the ordering process, part of the drive-thru screen turns into an order confirmation display to help ensure order accuracy.

Because of the building configuration, a food pick-up window was not an option for the drive-thru. Instead, once drive-thru guests have placed their order, they park in one of six parking stalls. A Golden Corral coworker brings their order to the car window and accepts payment.



**Parking stalls serve GC On the Go guests and third-party delivery drivers.**

## NEW, ROBUST SALES CHANNELS THAT ARE SAFE FOR GUESTS AND COWORKERS

“As we planned our response to the reality presented by Covid-19, central to our internal discussions was the question: ‘how do we do a few things differently, to serve and protect both our guests and our coworkers, since both groups have concerns related to the virus?’,” says Mike Cox, Marketing Director, Platinum Corral. “Expanding our On the Go options with the to-go room and the drive-thru opens sales channels, while reassuring both guests and coworkers.” The brand has also implemented measures that go “above and beyond” what is required, to ensure cleanliness and Covid-safe service, according to Cox.

## THE OUTCOME

Platinum Corral is currently planning the addition of a drive-thru at a second restaurant. It is also encouraging Golden Corral corporate and its fellow franchise owners to consider retrofitting their restaurants with drive-thrus and to-go rooms.

“I perceive that guests’ behavior has changed for the long-term as a result of Covid-19,” says Michael Cox, Marketing Director for Platinum Corral. “Offering these On the Go options gives us an opportunity to intersect with our guests’ ‘new normal’ behavior in new and different ways, and more often than we would have been able to in the past.”

Charles Stafford, Area Leader at Platinum Corral, adds, “When you look around, you see all kinds of places going out of business. As a business, we must evolve. If we don’t, we risk closing, too.”



Golden Corral’s average drive-thru service time is

**120 seconds**



**60 seconds**

better than most Quick Serve Restaurants.

# DRIVE-THRU SERVICE FASTER THAN SOME QSRS

Platinum Corral started with a service time goal of **360 seconds** in the drive-thru. They exceeded their goal by **60%**. “Our average drive-thru service time is **120 seconds**, which is about **60 seconds** better than most Quick Serve Restaurants,” says Stafford.

“Compared to QSR or Fast Casual concepts, we believe our guests are getting a better meal, served faster,” adds Cox. “Our guests are looking for value, as well as low-contact or no-contact service. We’ve achieved both, and our drive-thru adds speed to the equation. Safe to say, we’re putting smiles on the faces of a lot of guests.”

# ENGAGING DIGITAL DISPLAYS BOOST SALES

Industry studies show that **42%** of guests are influenced by digital menu boards. Those guests tend to spend **20% more**, per order. Displayed on large, bright vivid digital screens with plenty of images, the highly popular Golden Corral menu is mouthwatering.

It offers substantial, home cooking-style comfort food main dishes like bourbon chicken, fried chicken, and pot roast, along with sides, in individual or group/family portions.

To help capture guest attention and present menu offerings in the best light, Platinum Corral menu boards can engage guests by having parts of the menu change out or by displaying short video elements showing, for example, steam coming off the brand’s famous Bourbon Chicken.



Indoor Menu Board at the Walk-Up Service Counter

# CENTRAL MENU PORTAL READILY SCALES FROM ONE RESTAURANT TO MANY

Platinum Corral can manage menu content and pricing for all of its menu boards from a central portal. This helps ensure consistency and accuracy. It also gives the owner or operator control of not only menu offerings but also specials / limited time offers. Menu change-out between dayparts is automated. The ability to manage menu and pricing centrally also scales well for multiple-unit franchisees like Platinum Corral. The offerings and pricing can be pushed out to all locations, or a select sub-set of restaurants.

The web portal-based menu control encourages experimentation, which can be an important tactic when introducing entirely new channels like a walk-up counter and a drive-thru. “The restaurants that are doing well with their Covid-19 rebound are the ones that are listening to customers, responding to the needs of guests, and adapting,” says Stafford. “Xenial digital menu boards and the Xenial DMB portal support this kind of experimentation, adaptation and flexibility. Restaurant managers can start small and simple, like we did with our drive-thru breakfast, and then scale up.”

**“Our average drive-thru service time is 120 seconds, which is about 60 seconds better than most Quick Serve Restaurants.”**

**Billy Sewell,  
Platinum Corral**



Platinum Corral  
invested approximately  
**\$100,000**



These new channels  
are on track to provide  
**\$400,000 to \$500,000**  
in sales in the first year.



and with  
**45-50%**  
cash flow generation

## DRIVE-THRU CREATES A NEW “DAYPART,” GENERATES MORE SALES

The Jacksonville drive-thru has a traffic flow and sales pattern that is slightly offset from the dine-in meal period. Pre-drive-thru, the location was typically slow from 2 to 4 pm. Now, the drive-thru often picks up between 2 and 4. “The drive-thru buys us a meal period that didn’t exist before,” says Cox. “Which is great because labor costs are the same, regardless: our coworkers and managers were already in the building and on the clock. Only now, they’re serving more guests, and more meals.”

**“Our guests are looking for value, as well as low-contact / no-contact service. We’ve achieved both, and our drive-thru adds speed to the equation. Safe to say, we’re putting smiles on the faces of a lot of guests.”**

**Mike Cox, Marketing Director,  
Platinum Corral**



## ONE INVESTMENT WITH RAPID RETURN, EXPONENTIAL POSSIBILITIES

The Platinum Corral leadership team couldn’t be happier with the results they are seeing from the investment in the to-go room and drive-thru, featuring Xenial Digital Menu Boards.

Platinum Corral invested approximately **\$100,000** in the to-go room remodel, drive-thru and other minor property enhancements. Sales from these new channels are expected to be **\$400,000 to \$500,000** in the first year, with **45 to 50%** cash flow generation.

“Who wouldn’t want that kind of return?” asks Cox.

With the drive-thru and to-go room in place, the team can now add channels and sales, growing revenue, with minimal, if any, additional investment in either in capital or operations. “If we expand digital and off-premises, we’ll bolster our business, service channels, sales, and revenue, and give our guests additional convenience, and it all can be served by a single asset — the to-go room, with its resources and labor pool.”

## LABOR AND FOOD COST SAVINGS

The to-go room was a big experiment, so a lot of planning went into its design. "We knew a lot of meals would go out through the to-go room, so it would need to support efficient operations in a small footprint" says Stafford. "Still, we didn't overanalyze anything so we could move quickly."

It's an experiment that will pay big dividends for a long time. "When you merge multiple service channels into one area, you minimize labor expense and food cost because you're streamlining how you're putting out orders," says Stafford. "One room consolidates all the channels, the execution, and operation into one package."

## RESPONSIVE PARTNER WITH A HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL TEAM

"Everyone at Xenial has been very solid in their approach," remarks Cox. "I've worked with a range of Xenial team members, from team leads to back-end content people. All of my conversations have been extremely positive. When I've needed help, they've gotten me what I needed quickly. I've got high marks on all my interactions with Xenial."

Sewell adds, "I appreciate that Xenial turned around our request for menu boards in our very tight timeframe of **3 to 4 weeks**. Xenial's responsiveness speaks volumes about their service-first mindset and execution."

## COMPANY OVERVIEW

Golden Corral Buffet and Grill offers an endless buffet for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Its wholesome, hearty main dishes, sides, soup, salad, and dessert have become legendary favorites among loyal fans. Founded in 1973. Golden Corral has expanded to nearly 500 locations in 42 states. About 100 of these are company owned and operated, and the rest are franchises. To meet customer demand for off-premises dining, many locations offer "On the Go" services including delivery. Platinum Corral is the franchise company led by Billy Sewell, son of one of the original investors in Golden Corral restaurants. Platinum Corral owns 23 Golden Corral locations. Find a location or [learn more](#) about Golden Corral or explore [franchising opportunities](#).

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