



Photos courtesy of Inclusion Solutions

# HOW MAY I TAKE YOUR ORDER?

BY TOM FIGEL



**A**pproximately 65 percent of fast-food restaurant customers use drive-through for the desired service, experts say. So where does that leave the 2 million Deaf and 26 million hard-of-hearing people in the United States when using the drive-through? And how about the millions of nonEnglish speakers who may have communication barriers?

This past summer in Chicago, a local unit of a national fast-food restaurant tested a system that may possibly provide the

approximately 28 million people currently limited from using the drive-through better access to the entire fast-food industry. Now Culver's Restaurant, headquartered in Prairie Du Sac, Ill., is currently testing the system at restaurants in Delavan, Wis.; Buffalo Grove, Ill.; and Darien, Ill.; three of their 300 restaurants. The system is OrderAssist, a product of Chicago-based Inclusion Solutions.

Designed as a simple system for communication between restaurant staff and a cus-

**Opposite: At an OrderAssist test site, customer Carey Siegal flips his hearing aid to t-coil setting to receive speaker sound directly into his hearing aid.**

**Above: OrderAssist's simple genius. Customers push the Big Bell to alert restaurant personnel that they will be arriving at the window for fact-to-face service.**

tomers who is deaf or hard-of-hearing (D/HH) or with another communication barrier, the patent-pending OrderAssist gives a customer two options. The first option is to push the BigBell alerting staff inside and then pulling up to the service window where a restaurant staff member will provide a paper menu or other communication aid, such as a picture menu and face-to-face contact. The second option applies to the estimated 7 million people with hearing aids equipped with telecoils. With a flip of a switch, customers can activate their aid to receive sound directly from the speaker into their hearing aid or assistive listening device.

Restaurants have been able to partially address communication issues with D/HH customers during daytime hours of operation. Customers go to the counter where they can signify need and receive assistance in writing and through the use of picture menus. However at night, when many restaurants close their doors and limit service to drive-through traffic, many customers with speech and hearing obstacles are essentially excluded from the restaurant. According to Inclusion Solutions Vice President and Legal Counsel Hollister Bundy, the lack of equal access at night may be a violation of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Inclusion Solutions, recently featured in the April 2005 issue of *Fortune Small Business*, develops products to solve businesses' accessibility issues. An aspiring young entrepreneur, Patrick Hughes, president of Inclusion Solutions, developed his first product, the BigBell, in 2000 after an inspiring conversation with a friend who uses a wheelchair for mobility. The BigBell goes a step beyond the handicap push button on automatic doors, allowing customers with disabilities to alert retailers when they need assistance with opening doors, ascending steps and surmounting other barriers to entry. Inclusion Solutions next examined the drive-through service problem.

"We surveyed the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community in order to ask them what they would find most useful," Hughes said. "In a short time, more than 6,500 people responded. While some wanted automated touch screens at drive-throughs, and it might be the best for this community, technological limitations and prohibitive costs prevent these tools from being feasible on a systemic basis."

Working with Professor David Myers of Hope College in Holland, Mich., and others, Inclusion Solutions developed, in OrderAssist, a simple tool that franchises easily afford. OrderAssist's manufacturer has

given Inclusion Solutions exclusive rights to sell the induction loop technology in the restaurant industry.

"The solution is simple, dignified and effective," Hughes said. "We see all the time that all parties want things that work: the disabled community wants to be a customer and businesses like fast-food restaurants want the chance to gain the loyalty of an important segment of the U.S. population."

While Hughes and his company do their best to get the word out about Order Assist, Hughes encourages people with hearing loss to chime in by informing their favorite local restaurant about this simple, inexpensive way to open their drive-through service to a significant underserved market.

For more information, contact Inclusion Solutions, Inc., 773.338.9612, visit [www.inclusionsolutions.com](http://www.inclusionsolutions.com), or e-mail Patrick Hughes at [phughes@inclusionsolutions.com](mailto:phughes@inclusionsolutions.com). ■

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