

Sharky's Woodfired Mexican Grill

Bill.com is now an integral part of franchising system across all of our restaurants.



"I tried it out in one of our restaurants and now I'm an advocate – we're saving hours of employee time and there are no stacks of paper on my desk."



- Steve Paperno

Sharky's Woodfired Mexican Grill Franchisor Steve Paperno is on a mission to "change the way the world eats" by providing great tasting Mexican food made from organic and natural ingredients. Paperno says his priorities are to focus on his guests and franchisees, which is why he is such a supporter and advocate of Bill.com. The solution has enabled Paperno and his franchisees to minimize the amount of time they spend on accounting. Paperno says, "The more time I spend on my business and the less time I spend in the office, the more of an impact I have on the overall guest experience."



Paperno, whose parents owned a deli and whose own first business venture involved chocolate-covered bananas, was not always focused on light, healthy eating. He worked at his parents' traditional restaurant until he was 18, when he started Top Banana, a manufacturer of the chocolate dipped bananas sold at amusement parks, zoos and supermarkets. He

visited banana plantations in Central and South America and at one time even moved his manufacturing facility into Mexico.

By the time Paperno sold Top Banana, he was 28 and hooked on the "organic, wood-fired food" he'd found south of the border.

“Today, Sharky’s managers scan all invoices into the Bill.com system, which integrates them into the company’s QuickBooks program and passes them on for corporate approvals.”



“I couldn’t find the great tastes of Mexico that fit my healthy, athletic lifestyle,” Paperno said, “so I decided to start my own restaurant.” The first Sharky’s Woodfired Mexican Grill opened in Sherman Oaks in 1992, with fresh food prepared in an open kitchen, on a wood-fired grill and a stone-fired oven. Paperno now has 19 locations with 12 more on the way, but serving only fresh food created another problem. All those daily deliveries of fresh-caught fish, natural chicken breasts and just-off-the-tree avocados meant that his Sharky’s restaurants generated a mountain of vendor invoices.

Store managers collected the invoices into envelopes that they sent to Sharky’s corporate offices each week. “Our in-house accountant had to go over about 125 bills each week, to make sure that everything was correct, then passed them on for my approval,” said Paperno. When it was time to pay each invoice, each signed check was printed then folded into an addressed envelope that someone had to seal shut and run through a postage meter.

Paperno says the process wasted both time and paper. “I looked for a way to streamline this process, when I came across Bill.com on the Web. I was skeptical that it could work with our invoices, as they come in many styles and sizes,” said Paperno. “I tried it out in one of our restaurants and now I’m an advocate.”

Today, Sharky’s managers scan all invoices into the Bill.com system, which integrates them into the company’s QuickBooks program and passes them on for corporate approvals. The accountant adds a payment date and Bill.com pays each vendor at the right time, via check or electronic transfer. “We’re saving hours of employee time,” Paperno says, “and there are no stacks of paper on my desk. Well, at least not bills.”

Paperno started franchising in 2001 and has 12 more stores under contract to be built. Fast, casual Mexican restaurants are popular, and Paperno admits he could have expanded more quickly. “But I’m picky and want to sell franchises to only the right people, who share my passion for organic, natural

foods and fit into the Sharky’s culture,” he said. And Paperno will not approve a location unless it falls within the distribution area of the companies that provide the chain’s signature fresh food. So far, that means he will only sell franchises in California, Arizona, Idaho, Nevada and Washington.

“The reality is paperwork, just like e-mail, has become a huge distraction that has no benefit to our guests,” said Paperno. “We want our franchisees to focus on what really makes a difference like hiring the right people, impeccable training and culture building, along with getting to know their patrons. What we do not want is a franchisee who is burdened with paper work and not focused on building sales by providing great tasting food and exceptional service.” Now that Paperno has experienced Bill.com, he will be implementing it into his franchise system making it part of the accounting training for new and old franchisees alike.

“I am big supporter and advocate of Bill.com”