



**Category:** Dining

**Business Type:** Restaurant

**Employees:** 6,500

**Products:** Workforce  
Acquisition

### PROJECT BENEFITS

- Nearly 60 percent of needed new hires sourced and screened weeks ahead of a hiring event
- Significantly increased candidate pool and quality of applicants
- More than 50 hours saved by managers per restaurant opening

## Optimizing Staff Hiring at New Locations and Improving Manager Productivity

From the opening of its first restaurant in 1975, Rock Bottom Restaurants Inc. (RBR) established its reputation as a destination eatery featuring fresh, handcrafted beers and a diverse food menu. Expansion plans are strong for its growth vehicles — Old Chicago, Rock Bottom Restaurant and Brewery, and ChopHouse Brewery — while maintaining integrity with the more mature sister concepts Walnut Brewery and Sing Sing. With nearly 100 eateries and brewpubs across North America, the company employs 6,500 people throughout its locations and has annual sales exceeding \$250 million. RBR's leadership believes in a very strong correlation between the quality of the people it employs and its ability to support its growth objectives.

Achieving an on-schedule opening of a new restaurant requires Herculean effort in planning and execution. Employees must be quickly yet carefully chosen to ensure that brand quality and consistency are preserved in the new locale. RBR management is typically deluged with applications for employment when new sites open. This exceptional demand on management attention during the critical few weeks prior to a new opening was distracting, costly, and tended to cause mistakes. And in an industry with annual employee turnover well over 100 percent — and replacement costs as high as \$2,500 per employee — RBR needed a system that would help managers make the best hiring decisions to mitigate the time and dollar costs associated with turnover.

Faced with an aggressive expansion plan, RBR sought a system to optimize the hiring process for new restaurant openings. The solution RBR selected: the Kronos® Workforce Acquisition™ hiring solution. And with Kronos, RBR has successfully streamlined recruiting and hiring activities. Improved manager productivity, and achieved its goal of continuously improving the quality of its workforce.

### Online applications provide crucial prescreening

RBR managers needed a way to quickly screen out unqualified applicants while maximizing interview time with promising candidates. They also needed guidelines to help them select future employees judged most likely to enhance the RBR reputation for service excellence.

First, Kronos implemented an electronic job application through the RBR corporate Web site. Job seekers submit applications in advance of public hiring events, permitting RBR to effortlessly assemble an initial slate of promising candidates who are worth inviting to in-person interviews. “The ability to build applicant pools for upcoming restaurant openings represents a tremendous time savings for our managers,” says Director of Leadership and OD Joan Crawford.

Prescreening for applicant eligibility was accomplished by including qualifying questions in the job application. By ensuring that online applicants are of legal age to work and are legally able to work in the United States, RBR is able to filter out unqualified applicants automatically without distracting management. Included in the online process are questions regarding eligibility for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). So is a personality assessment that provides insights into each applicant's suitability for a particular position. Conveniently, the application process creates an electronic record that is preserved for later use in the hiring life cycle, as well as for uploading to other human resource management systems, including time and attendance and payroll.

### On-site application devices process the crush of applications

The approaching date of a new restaurant opening is eagerly anticipated by job seekers attracted to the RBR brand. At a pre-advertised group hiring event, RBR places eight to ten Kronos application devices at temporary facilities rented near the new restaurant. These devices accommodate the hundreds of applicants that typically descend upon RBR managers at the event. Prospective applicants complete their applications in either English or Spanish. Prescreening questions posed early in the application process identify unqualified applicants, who are then quickly removed from the eligible applicant pool.

The job application used for a group hiring event is identical to the interactive application accessed on the RBR Web site, and is processed in real time. In addition to eligibility checks, the application includes specific questions that screen for personality characteristics associated with successful employee performance for specific restaurant job positions. This screening can help determine whether the applicant is a good fit for one of the positions available at the new location. And it helps ensure that a consistent approach is utilized to establish best-fit candidates for RBR. Managers can then perform interviews and extend job offers on the spot — a major benefit for RBR that saves a lot of time.

“The efficiency with which applicants can be processed through the [Kronos] on-site solution is tremendous,” comments Jim Mahnke, general manager at the Old Chicago restaurant located in Gresham, Ore. “At our opening recruitment event we were able to accept and process more than 900 applications in just four days, successfully completing our hiring targets with top-quality candidates.”

### Workforce productivity improved with elimination of paperwork

Of particular importance to RBR is the need for flexible scheduling of restaurant personnel to staff its extended hours of operation. Kronos Workforce Acquisition collects applicants’ preferred hours and days of work. This provides RBR managers with advance knowledge of future employee preferences. And it allows interviewers to consider individual shift preferences in the context of the overall applicant pool.

*“Making sure we have the best employees in a crowded market is very important. And we feel that if we can continue to leverage our Kronos tool, we will distance ourselves from our competitors in the very important strategic point of employee selection.”*

**Ted Williams,**  
Senior Vice President of Operations

Beyond the shift-scheduling information, Workforce Acquisition manages nearly 30 different new-hire forms for RBR: state and federal employment tax registrations, orientation and training forms, payroll integration forms, integration records for RBR’s time and attendance system, applications for WOTC credits, and more. Kronos automatically generates the correct combination of forms for each newly hired employee. “Not only do we save hours and hours of paperwork,” notes Mahnke, “but we don’t worry about errors, lost forms, or incomplete information.”

### Improved workforce quality = improved sales growth

RBR depends upon the skills, enthusiasm, and professionalism of its employees to enhance its brand throughout its multiconcept chain. “In an aggressive restaurant business where the quality of employee service is what makes us stand out, we believe that our [Kronos] solution will give us a competitive edge by allowing us to hire better employees,” remarks Senior Vice President of Operations Ted Williams. The ease with which employees can be recruited through Workforce Acquisition sets a clear standard of efficiency and consistency for successful restaurant expansion. And this helps RBR effectively achieve its objective of sales growth through the expansion of its concept locations.



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