

Menu Labeling Mandated in Health Care Reform Act

Digital Menu Boards Serving up Fulfilling Solutions

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This white paper examines menu labeling legislation as outlined in the Health Care Reform Act, and explores the solutions available through digital menu boards and digital signage.



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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	03
Menu Labeling Standards.....	03
National Standards - What Should be Disclosed?.....	04
What Does NOT Need to be Disclosed	04
Today's Solution: Digital Signage.....	04
The Benefits of Digital Signage.....	04
Nutritional Labeling Platform	05
Wireless Ronin Technologies	07

MENU LABELING MANDATED IN HEALTH CARE REFORM ACT. DIGITAL MENU BOARDS SERVING UP FULFILLING SOLUTIONS

by Linda Hofflander

If you work in the quick serve or fast casual restaurant industry chances are you've been discussing menu and menu board labeling legislation for some time now. Many American restaurateurs have anxiously watched and waited as new federal food and menu labeling bills were introduced to the Senate in the fall of 2008, which proposed to mandate and regulate the posting and availability of nutritional and caloric information within restaurant chains across the country.

The wait is over! On March 23, 2010, President Obama signed into law the Health Care Reform Act which included menu labeling language that will require caloric information on chain restaurant menus, menu boards, and drive-through displays. The legislation applies across the country to chains with 20 or more locations, requiring them to provide nutritional information to consumers at the point of purchase, and to provide additional nutritional information on request.

This new law currently has the Food and Drug Administration creating a national standard for menu labeling for restaurants or food establishments with 20 or more locations doing business under the same name, and offering substantially the same menu items, regardless of a particular location's ownership status. Within 120 days of the Act's enactment the United State's Secretary of Health and Human Services will publish a notice in the Federal Register specifying the terms and conditions for implementation. No later than one year after the date of the enactment of this clause, the Secretary will disseminate the final regulations imposed to carry out mandates aspects of this provision.

The Secretary's proposed regulations will specify the format and manner of nutrient disclosure requirements and take into consideration a variety of factors such as standardization of recipes and method of preparation, reasonable variation in serving size and formulation of menu items, allotted space on menus and menu boards, inadvertent human error, training of food service workers, and allowable variations in ingredients.

Labeling standards outlined by the FDA will supersede all existing state and city laws. The requirements will also be enforced by the FDA, with the possibility of the imposition of criminal penalties for non-compliance.

The National Restaurant Association (NRA) praised passage of the provision in the bill that will provide more consistent nutritional information to consumers in chain restaurants across the country.⁽¹⁾

MENU LABELING STANDARDS

There has been significant support within the food service industry, and most notably the National Restaurant Association (NRA), for implementing national standards for menu labeling as a single federal standard will control the propagation of conflicting and confusing individual state and local regulations. In fact, many chains see a national standard as the answer to managing the inevitable complexity of compliance.⁽²⁾

Keeping nutritional and caloric information alongside a menu item may be the easiest way for the consumer to understand what they are buying, but it serves up corresponding communication challenges for the store owner at the point of purchase. As a result, many restaurants currently provide nutritional and calorie information through in-store brochures, tray liners, small signage, wrappers, and online websites.

For food services conducting business across the country, the lack of an instant communication solution hinders compliance, productivity and efficiency. To comply with enacted reform measures, specifically the legislatively-driven communication of nutritional information, creating and installing the ability to instantly push data to consumers' in-store with a push of a button is now mission critical for restaurants. In response, many are turning their attention to evaluating technology solutions as a method of delivering the information now required by law.



The expense and logistical maneuvering necessary to remain compliant with legislation directly impacts the profits and public perception of the restaurant industry. How can the industry accurately maintain and communicate to customers the nutritional information necessary to meet the new federal regulations? The answer lies in

digital signage systems that perform intelligent, multi-sourced data analysis, extract menu item nutritional data and publish it real-time via a digital display to align with the day-parted menu board viewed in-store.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

What should be disclosed?⁽³⁾

1. Standard Menu Items on menu boards and drive-through menu boards should include:
 - a. A calorie disclosure statement adjacent to the name of the standard menu item stated within the context of total daily diet.
 - b. A statement about suggested daily calorie intake in a way that the public can understand the context of their food choice.
 - c. A statement about the availability of additional nutritional information that should be available upon request.
2. Self-Service Food and Food on Display such as a salad bar, buffet line, cafeteria line or similar self-service facility and self-service beverage will require a sign be placed next to each food item listing calories displayed per food item or serving.
3. Variable Menu Items such as pizza, ice cream and beverages. The Secretary will establish regulations for disclosing nutritional information for standard menu items that come in different flavors, varieties or combinations but are listed as a single menu item.
4. Vending Machines for operators running 20 or more vending machines will be required to display a sign placed in close proximity to the food item or selection button clearly stating the number of calories in the item.

* The primary writing of the restaurant or retail food establishment from which a consumer makes an order selection.

What does NOT need to be disclosed?

1. Items not listed on the menu board such as condiments or other general use items.



2. Daily specials, custom orders or temporary menu items appearing less than 60 days a year.

3. Food that is part of a market test and appearing less than 90 days.

TODAY'S SOLUTION: DIGITAL SIGNAGE

To adequately address the nutritional labeling requirements restaurants are turning to intelligent software to link menu labeling with recipes via digital menu-boards or signage.

An intelligent menu labeling system shares nutritional information based on the menu items currently offered. This allows valuable menu signage real-estate to focus on revenue generating food items.

Quick service and fast casual restaurants are turning to digital media as the solution to quickly become 100% compliant with nutritional labeling legislation. Hardware costs have fallen and the more modern, all-in-one signage systems are cost-effective, providing a return on investment by reducing the expense of traditional print design, printing, kitting, shipping and installation.

An intelligent digital menu board and nutritional labeling system can provide:

- Legally compliant nutritional information
- Compelling menu item video and images
- Sales Lift
- Consistent messaging
- Reduced perceived wait times
- Reduce or eliminate POS clutter

THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL SIGNAGE

Fortunately, message management through digital signage technology solutions allows immediate delivery and site control of menu items, nutritional data, and promotions down to the store level. This simplifies compliance, taking seconds to click a button vs. the weeks to adjust traditional print solutions. Digital menu and promotional messaging boards assist not only in satisfying governmental labeling requirements, but lifts sales. Adopting digital menu and promotional boards facilitates compliance with governmental labeling requirements and increases sales.

In addition, digital signage provides features and benefits that enhance the in-store experience and environment, including:

Database Integration

Automatically update calorie, serving size and other nutritional information on your menu board content by linking into an information database.

Consistency

Manage thousands of locations with RoninCast® software from one central location. Keep nutritional information and corporate branding accurate with 100% compliance in all locations.

Space Management

Leverage the dynamic nature of digital signage to provide more engaging graphics and information through your menu boards. Animating menu item transitions and item rotations helps you communicate more information.

Day-Parting

Schedule your menu between breakfast, lunch, dinner and late night with menu boards specifically geared to change on your time line.

Versatile

Implement touch screen order menu boards that allow customers freedom to order on their own. Even display messages in various languages to effectively tailor communication to each location's demographic trends.

Flexible Control

Provide various levels of content control access all the way down to store level, yet retain corporate oversight. Allow location managers to select daily specials, or customize their menus for their area while verifying nutritional information provided is maintained.

Menu Nutritional Labeling

Nutritional regulations are quickly going to change menu board design. Take advantage of the dynamic nature of digital signage to make the most of your menu board's message space.

NUTRITIONAL LABELING PLATFORM

RoninCast® is a comprehensive digital signage solution which addresses the mission critical needs of the quick service and fast casual restaurant industries. Wireless Ronin's software product features and valuable services include:

RoninCast® Digital Signage Software:

Centralized Control - manage content and review the status of the media players and network locations at any time.

Network Grouping - set up digital signage network groups and subgroups for specific content distribution.

Scheduling - create and change schedules so that content will play automatically on the time line you specify.

Database Integration - retrieve database information to automatically update messages, information and content.

Data Mining - support your marketing and communication efforts with user data collected from users touch screen interactions.

Content Zoning - divide your displays into separate zones to play various content types which can be updated independently.

Wireless Ronin Services:

Consulting - share goals and map program models during our discovery phases to determine your network structure.

Creative - work with our design team to produce messages that are both influential and memorable with brand consistency.

Project Management - our team will oversee the implementation of your network to keep you on budget and on time.

Training - take advantage of our training service to bring your team together and learn RoninCast® software functionality.



**THE IDEAL
POSTING SOLUTION**
Must handle delivery,
monitoring, and operational
management of digital messages
in a single unified package.

Hosting - our Network Operations Center (NOC) is available 24/7/365 for customers needing round the clock network monitoring.

Support - take advantage of software upgrades and hardware maintenance with a service package designed to meet your needs.

CONCLUSION

For restaurant industry members affected by nutritional labeling legislation and seeking an easy, cost effective method to comply, Wireless Ronin's RoninCast® for QSR and Fast Casual Restaurants provides a solution. By efficiently linking menu recipe databases with digital displays that can be multi-purposed throughout the environment, restaurants can reduce costs, improve messaging compliance, speed data transmission and facilitate consumer the decision-making processes.



FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Fast Casual, Christa Hoyland, Contributing writer. (April 2, 2009). Will national menu labeling hold?
- 2 Authenticated US Government Information, 111th Congress 1st Session H.R. 1398 (March 9, 2009)
- 3 Menu labeling section 2572 of health care reform bill 3962

ABOUT WIRELESS RONIN

Wireless Ronin is a digital media leader in the fast casual and QSR industries with RoninCast® dynamic digital signage and its creative and technical support services. RoninCast® digital menu boards allow:

- Never-before seen flexibility in product advertising, menu day-parting and decreased time-to-market with new products and promotions.
- Maintain corporate brand identity while allowing unique market segments the ability to customize to their specific locations needs.
- Extend that experience into additional areas for improved dining experiences with entertainment programming.
- Take it into the back room for employee training.
- Create an engaging drive-thru with dynamic digital menu boards for full audience reach.

Wireless Ronin has the services and support structure to assist you where needed through each and every step of the process. Through our NOC located in Minneapolis, MN, we can monitor the health of your network, schedule content, verify updates, and service your needs 7/24/365.

RoninCast® digital signage software is an award-winning technology that has generated numerous awards for clients in the area of interactive innovation, environmental design, hospitality, top merchandising, and absolute excellence in electronic media.

In December 2008, Wireless Ronin's digital menu board application for Kentucky Fried Chicken was named one of the Best New Products of 2008 by Visual Merchandising and Store Design (VMSD) magazine.

In February 2010, Wireless Ronin received an Apex Award at the Digital Signage Expo & Interactive Technology Expo for innovative excellence in Hospitality - ARAMARK Corporation, and a Digital Signage Content Award - ARAMARK Corporation for Burger Studio.

Wireless Ronin has extensive experience in serving up technology needs in the form of menu boards, promotional and eatery signage, POS toppers and drive-thru communications. The organization has a reputation for drilling down on key business unit drivers to deliver mission critical solutions, software, and services.

To find out how Wireless Ronin can help streamline your labeling compliance and enhance your in-store communications contact Karolyn Hart at khart@wirelessronin.com or visit www.wirelessronin.com.



About The Author:

Linda Hofflander is Strategic Partner at Wireless Ronin. She has over 20 years experience in communications with much of her career focusing on the alignment of business drivers with new and upcoming technologies. Linda sits on the Digital ScreenMedia Association (DSA) Board and is a member of the Digital Signage Speakers Bureau. She is on the National Board of the University of Minnesota Alumni Association (UMAA), and on the Digital Media Board of Uber Baby.



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