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### Selecting a restaurant consultant

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When George Raios decided to take Mr. Greek, his popular Canadian casual-dining chain, down a fast-casual route, he figured he knew his business well enough to do it alone. Quickly realizing he needed outside direction and strategy to make another concept work, Raios reached out for help and called 911 in the restaurant business — a consultant.

Restaurant consultants say the most successful partnerships occur when an operator knows when to ask for help. In fast casual, the trick is correctly defining the concept for the owner and the customers, said consultant Arlene Spiegel.

“You can’t just put in a sofa or an upscale design and call fast food a fast casual,” Spiegel said.



*Based in New York, restaurant consultant Arlene Spiegel is getting more fast-casual clients. She believes that it takes more than a nice sofa to claim you run a fast-casual restaurant.*

As fast-casual concepts catch on globally, several universal challenges are becoming common in the segment: cook times and arrival rates exceeding the capacity of the kitchen.

“Fast casuals need help getting services and standards to a science,” Spiegel said. “They frequently need consultation to establish designs on how best to have customers order, pay for, receive and consume the food.”

A fast casual excels when it can trump the declining customer service offered at a casual dining concept, said Brian Sill, president of Deterministics, a Kirkland, Wash.-based firm, who suggests an

industrial engineer’s approach to answer service issues.

“We analyze workflows and workloads,” Sill said. “We identify bottlenecks that slow service and identify where there is wasted