

# Boston Sunday Globe

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## Money & Careers

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### ON THE HOT SEAT

#### Instant feedback

Ken Kimmel's Survey on the Spot uses mobile technology to allow restaurants to find out exactly what their customers are thinking. **G3**

### CONSUMER REPORTS

#### Smartphones getting smarter

Motorola's Droid 2 and the BlackBerry Torch 9800 show how subtle design changes can make a big difference. **G2**



### JOB DOC

#### The wealth doctor is in

Financial planner Neil Blicher helps families analyze and manage their fiscal health. **G2**

### OF MUTUAL INTEREST

#### Kid stuff

One fund is earning strong returns while teaching children about investing. **G4**

## Instant customer feedback helps restaurants improve

### Ken Kimmel

Cofounder  
Survey on the Spot

Nothing beats instant customer feedback, according to Survey on the Spot cofounder Ken Kimmel. Kimmel, 56, is helping restaurants capture these comments to improve their businesses with mobile technology designed by his Newton start-up. Kimmel, who previously was an executive at Dunkin' Brands Inc., recently spoke with Globe reporter Jenn Abelson.

#### What is so special about your company?

With Survey on the Spot, customers can take the survey when they are in the shop. It doesn't require you to recall as much because you're still right there. Nobody is currently doing what we're doing, which every day surprises me.

#### When did your business launch?

The company went live with its app in November 2009.

#### That doesn't sound like a great time to start a company.

The challenge of a new business

like ours is finding customers. Getting those first brave souls is key. Change is hard. Restaurants are used to having somebody take a receipt and go home to a website as opposed to doing it on an iPhone or smartphone.

#### So who are the brave souls?

99 Restaurants, British Beer Company, Finale, and Not your Average Joe's.

#### How does the technology work?

The original model — the one that Finale uses — prompts customers to go to Survey on the Spot while in the restaurant with an insert with the check at the end of the meal. It says "Please go to Survey on the Spot, and we'll reward you with a coupon for \$4 off your next visit with us." If customers have a BlackBerry or smartphone, they go to surveyonthespot.com, they go to Finale, and they can take the survey. And then immediately, results are compiled into a Web portal Finale can access, and they can see results instantaneously.

#### How have other restaurants used the technology?

Not Your Average Joe's is starting

to deliver an iPod to every guest with the check. It's getting an enormous level of response. They're seeing 1,000 surveys a month when typically the norm would be 100 surveys a month.

At 99 Restaurants, they like to use this for menu innovation. They have a research and development restaurant where they create menu items and an internal group of executives will try them all and then rate them. And now they use iPods and Survey on the Spot rather than putting it on paper and tabulating results. So as soon as the meeting is done, they can get the results immediately.

#### What changes have restaurants made based on the feedback from these surveys?

At British Beer Company, customers had a really poor experience with one of the menu items. It was a wrap. It may have been a little dried out. So they were able to go in there and fix it. At other restaurants, managers are able to see when servers have not been having the best day. If someone answers a question very negatively, it will send a text message

or e-mail to the manager or chief executive. It does that within five or 10 minutes of completing the survey. The manager can then address the issue with the customer before they leave upset.

#### How is working at a start-up different from your time at a huge company like Dunkin'?

At Dunkin' Brands, there was a real corporate infrastructure and templates for how do business. When you're really small and trying to get things going, your customers almost become part of an advisory board to help you build your business. It's much easier to adapt to the free form feedback because you don't have the corporate bureaucracy.

#### Can you tell from these surveys how consumers have changed during the recession?

We see a lot of comments about value. That's very indicative of the current economic environment. When they're concerned, it's, "Gee it seems kind of expensive," or, "Something was more than I thought; the price is not right," or "The portion size is too small."



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