

Food Industry

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Pizza Hut Web-based order 'game' is all business

Nation's Restaurant News, March 14, 2005 by Alan J. Liddle

Sony Online Entertainment Inc. officials reported that "a pretty good number of pizzas are being ordered" through a current promotion that permits participants in the EverQuest II fantasy, role-playing game to order food for delivery from Pizza Hut Inc.'s Internet site.

The EverQuest II-Pizza Hut link is believed to mark the first time online players have been able to issue a command from inside a game to request and receive real goods in their homes, but it probably won't be the last, according to SOE sources. EverQuest II players need only type the command "/pizza" from within the game to open a second Web browser that displays www.pizzahut.com, from which many, if not most, players can take advantage of the pizza chain's Web-based ordering system.

Patty Sullivan, director of public relations for Dallas-based Pizza Hut, characterized the link between her 10,000-plus-unit chain and SOE's Everquest II activities as "a test" in the early stages and had no further comment. She noted that while Pizza Hut's online delivery capability might not reach every small market, "a significant percentage of the Pizza Hut system now has online ordering. If it didn't, we would be reluctant to enter a test such as this."

Chris Kramer, director of corporate communications for San Diego-based SOE, said the EverQuest II-Pizza Hut relationship "is going pretty well" and is resonating strongly with his company's customer base of more than 330,000 active EverQuest II account holders. He explained that SOE receives financial consideration of an unspecified nature for providing Pizza Hut with access to its customers and added, "This is a test for us, but we expect to see more deals like this in the future."

It remains to be seen just how many incremental pizza orders will result from Pizza Hut's new pipeline to EverQuest II players. However, gamers' affinity for delivered pizza is well known--at least in pop culture, if not in chain-restaurant marketing circles. For example, in a recent "Doonesbury" comic strip, an avid online gamer claims to be ignorant of the key used to issue the "pause" command when he is asked by his father to half the action temporarily, to which his irritated dad replies, "It's the one you press when pizza arrives."

Kramer said one of Sony Online Entertainment's goals is to more tightly integrate product ordering into game play in the future, possibly to the point where gamers could charge such transactions to their Sony accounts. "That would be more convenient for our subscribers and make more sense for our revenue stream," he said.

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