



**RADFORD**  
UNIVERSITY

## University Delivers Innovative On-Campus Dining Experience with Smart Food Lockers

### CHALLENGE

Radford University, located in the city of Radford, Virginia, needed to move customers through food service lines and take care of them in the safest and most expeditious manner possible. On top of this, social distancing played a key role, adding to the length of the lines. Of course, what happens when lines get too long? People leave. With no time to stand in queue, the challenge is how to best serve the customer, without adding staff. Radford posed this question to their food service provider, who offered some viable and innovate options, including food lockers. Similar to other industries faced with similar situations, a pick-up locker was proposed, and it clicked with Radford's Director of University Services, James Perkins. No waiting in line, but would it work in this environment? And with that, the wheels went into motion and the Panasonic and Ondo Food Locker Teams were contacted.

### SOLUTION

The solution was not only a sensible solution for long lines, but one which ensured safety and put Radford on the map as being one of the first universities to adopt this new and innovative food pick-up method. Immediately recognizing the value, Radford went with 4 lockers, 12 cubbies each, serving multiple locations across campus, for students with a meal plan. With the ability to handle hot, cold, and ambient temperature, food is always held at the right temperature. The solution served three areas of concern: convenience, safety, and contactless. Using their contract dining provider's mobile application platform that was tied to the students' meal plan they enabled mobile ordering.

Now, students simply walk up, scan a QR code, and pick up their orders without having to engage with staff, or wait in line. The entire solution minimized crowding, waiting in line at peak order times, and delivering a convenient solution for students between classes. All in all, Radford was poised to now handle additional students on campus, because the locker solution eliminated long lines and ensured proper social distancing.

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## RESULT

Students have been extremely happy with the Smart Lockers and the mobile app's functionality. Last semester, over 16,000 orders were executed through the food lockers. They realized Radford made this investment in innovative technology, for them.... the students... and both the students and their parents are extremely grateful. And, there were no additional fees for using this technology. Radford knew, families shouldn't be burdened with additional costs, but rather, the university wanted to do what was best for their students – provide a safe and convenient environment. Numbers of students utilizing the lockers are growing day by day, expanding on the school's meal plan enrollment and keeping a larger share of the student's meal purchases on campus.

Radford University is a comprehensive public university of 10,695 students that has received national recognition for many of its undergraduate and graduate academic programs, as well as its sustainability initiatives.

As their mission statement states: "We embrace innovation and tradition and instill students with purpose and the ability to think creatively and critically. We provide an educational environment and the tools to address the social, economic and environmental issues confronting our region, nation and the world."

Learning the habits of the customers to determine the hot/cold cubby mix has been a learning curve, as it depends on many variables, including time of day, the season, what students are currently enrolled, etc. Once students return in the fall of 2021 and they are back to a normal operational flow, not only does Radford believe the usage of the lockers will increase, but through usage analytics, they'll be able to get a better idea of student ordering patterns and how to plan for them.



What was interesting to Perkins was not only the excitement of the students on campus, but also perspective students and their families that the Radford tour guide brought through the dining facility. The Smart Lockers are visually sharp in their "Radford Red" color. "Perspective students see the efforts and that resonates with the

*“All of our interaction with Panasonic has been outstanding. The Panasonic representative was on site during the installation, stayed as long as needed and continues to check on Radford. I am over the moon with the support provided by Panasonic.”*

— James Perkins, Director of University Services

families. Even the lights in the lockers catch your eye. Didn't anticipate how much that would impact the families coming through. All in all, the lockers contribute to a very positive experience, said James Perkins”

In addition to the innovative Smart Lockers, Radford food service staff also uses Panasonic's TOUGHBOOK FZ-G1 10 Windows Tablets.



Working behind the counter, the staff is able to see which locker is available, reserve the locker, and make the trip to deliver food. Being able to reserve the locker provides additional efficiency, as the runner can reserve the locker and because of this, only makes one trip to fulfill the food order. Additionally, because the lockers are shared by multiple restaurants in the food service area, knowing what cubbies are available, and temperature required, translates into customer satisfaction because the food is served / picked up at the correct temperature.

### What's next for Radford University and Smart Lockers?

Over the course of the next 3 years, there will inevitably be dining program enhancements. With the beauty of analytics, Radford will be able to review the Smart Locker results and better determine usage data and trends so can they make intelligent and accurate investments in the program. Certainly, some of the enhancements will necessitate additional lockers. "Even when social distancing isn't necessary, customer service won't go back to the way it was. There will still be a need to look at new technology and adding it to this, so the customers' expectations are met. We've seen what can be done during COVID and will continue to grow with new technology."

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