



[me]  
marginedge



multi-unit management and rapid growth

# A CLOSER LOOK...

#### LOCATION

Delaware, South Carolina

#### CUISINE

Brewery, Full Service, Fast Casual

#### NUMBER OF RESTAURANTS

8

#### TECH STACK

Toast, QuickBooks Online

#### KEY FEATURES

Recipes, Bill Pay, Menu Analysis,  
Actual vs Theoretical Variance,  
Inventory

## The goal

Ted's team at Crooked Hammock Brewery, part of La Vida Hospitality, faced the challenge of efficiently managing their rapidly growing operations, particularly in recipe management, menu analysis, cost control, and accounting processes.

## [me] solution <sup>\*</sup> <sup>\*</sup>

MarginEdge provided a comprehensive solution that streamlined operations, from enhancing team training to optimizing menu pricing and profitability with detailed menu analysis. Additionally, MarginEdge's bill payment tools offered significant time savings and increased accuracy in their accounting practices, allowing Ted's team to focus on expansion and improving their culinary and beverage offerings.

# Crooked Hammock Brewery: Where are they now?

Starting as a backyard-inspired brewpub, Crooked Hammock has always been about creating special moments with friends and family in a familiar environment. The founders were inspired by their love for the beach and the desire to recreate those lazy, hammock-filled summer days.

And while the vibes may be laidback, running a bustling and rapidly growing restaurant group rarely is – all part of what makes that never-let-them-see-you-sweat magic so much more, well, magical.

When we last spoke with culinary director, Ted Deptula, Crooked Hammock was focused on tracking costs, being able to update their menus dynamically, better efficiencies and managing volatile price changes at a glance.



Fast forward to now, Crooked Hammock has kept on growing, expanding their locations to include North Myrtle Beach, SC, Middletown, DE and well on their way to heading further south to Charleston, SC. We recently caught up with Ted to chat about what's changed, what hasn't and what is still on the horizon.

## Where Are They Now

La Vida Hospitality, Crooked Hammock's managing restaurant group, is really making waves expanding their business with new locations, including one in Myrtle Beach and two Taco Reho restaurants in Delaware. They're also opening a Big Chill restaurant, complete with a rooftop bar and a Latin, island-inspired fusion menu. Sounds pretty unbeatable if you ask us.

You know a new concept just has to be good when it comes from the same group that gives you beers like Savagely Delicious (a triple IPA brewed with actual Lucky Charms cereal) and – my personal favorite – Banana Hammock (a monstrous Belgian quad at 15% ABV brewed with banana and cacao).

Ted is currently focusing more on the Big Chill and Taco Reho brands and their culinary development while leading that department. His work there has mainly been focused on



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Culinary Director

kitchen design, leadership training and menu design. If only La Vida Hospitality had a restaurant management system that could help streamline some of those tasks and make running multi-unit expansion a little easier. Spoiler alert – they do!

Ted notes, "I can honestly say that we use every single feature that's available in MarginEdge – maybe not always to its fullest capacity – but in some way, shape, or form we're using everything that MarginEdge has."

## **A Brewtiful User Experience**

Since they have multiple concepts and multiple teams making the magic happen, having a user-friendly tool is incredibly important.

"I said this last time I'll say it again. I think MarginEdge is very slick and has a really great user interface that makes it easy to understand what you're doing in the software." He explains more, "It isn't muddled up with a lot of extra information that shouldn't be there. It's very to the point. I really like that it keeps you focused by being organized in a linear way where you can just look at one thing at a time and not be distracted by several different features at once, so the teams do pick it up pretty easily."

The user-friendly interface has also come in handy while Ted has been spending his time helping the



Taco Reho owner, Billy Lucas, who is also a chef, understand more about the structure of their food costs and variance reporting in MarginEdge. He says, "MarginEdge compiles all the food cost and variance reporting for us, so helping our team easily understand how to navigate that reporting is where I can really contribute to their success."

When it comes to training new teams, MarginEdge is a key part of that process, particularly when it comes to the recipe viewer tool. "Without a doubt the thing that I think separates MarginEdge from other RMS software is the recipe viewer that has become an integral part of our operation. We no longer have paper recipes or a recipe book because everything is done through the recipe viewer."

He tells us a little more about their process, "When we write the recipe, we write thorough methods and we include pictures for the tablets that are

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installed in our prep rooms. That information is available to anyone in the building at any time. We create a quick link on the desktop of that tablet so that when they click on it, it takes them right to the recipe viewer. They log in and can search for recipes with pictures by category."

The recipe viewer has streamlined training their teams across locations, and while they already have an impressive process, they're continuing to improve with MarginEdge in mind. Ted tells us, "We're going to start experimenting with video. I'm going to do some demos of me making some of the recipes and then load the videos into MarginEdge. I haven't done that yet, but that's the next evolution."

## **Menu Analysis that Keeps Guests Hoppy**

Utilizing the recipe viewer is just the first step in optimizing their menus. In their current high-growth phase, driving revenue is a major priority. By leveraging MarginEdge's comprehensive menu analysis tools, Ted and his team can drill down into the specifics of each dish's cost, popularity, and profitability to make sure they're in tune with goals and meeting guest expectations.

The detailed insights from MarginEdge's menu analysis tool allow them to quickly identify which items are the stars of the menu, bringing in high margins and customer satisfaction, and which are underperforming or costing more than they're worth.

"I use menu analysis quite often to try to figure out what are our customers ordering the most, what's the most popular, and what are some of the dogs," Ted continues, "It helps to make sure that we're taking the dish's margins into account and trying to be strategic. I use it both to look at our PMIX and also to understand the opportunities that exist within each menu item that we sell."

MarginEdge's real-time data also enables Ted to make swift decisions about menu adjustments. Whether it's swapping out an ingredient that has become prohibitively expensive or tweaking a recipe to improve margins without compromising on quality, Ted relies on the software to provide the actionable insights needed. This dynamic approach to menu management ensures that Crooked Hammock Brewery and its sister restaurants not only meet their financial goals but also continue to surprise and delight their patrons with innovative and cost-effective culinary offerings.

Aside from their delicious menu offerings, beer is still Crooked Hammock's hops and water (that was a poor attempt at a play on "bread and butter" for those following along at home). Their new director of beer, Larry, has been a great addition to the team and to how they utilize MarginEdge.

Ted tells us, "Larry's awesome. He's been in the industry for several decades and the first core beers that he's made have been my favorite, and he'll continue to be coming out with new products. Even as such an experienced brewer, he's also embraced MarginEdge and uses it to look at potential waste. He's rolling up barrels from the sales, seeing how many ounces of beer we sell from the barrels, and creates a variance report from that, so he's very much on board."

## Staying Balanced with Real-time Pricing Adjustments

Menu pricing is a delicate balance, and as any experienced operator knows, even small changes can have a big impact – both good or bad. Thankfully, with a dynamic tool like MarginEdge, Ted has been able to successfully make changes that increase profitability and quickly pivot when those changes have a less-than-desired impact.

He tells us, "I have had a handful of dishes that we tweaked the price on and we saw a significant movement on the analysis grid."



Oftentimes a customer might be deterred by a low price and feel like it must not have the value that they're expecting, and so by increasing the price we increase the perception of what that value is and suddenly the dish starts taking off from people ordering it more."

Being able to see that movement in real-time thanks to the integration with their POS systems is also helpful when sales aren't coming in like they should. "We had a chicken entree that was priced just a bit too high. I brought the price down just a few dollars and that had a significant positive result and the amount of sales we saw for that dish."

Their brand values also play a significant role in sales performance. Ted explained to us that they had a dish sitting right on the edge of their dog category, and he was able to determine that it was a poor-performing dish overall because it didn't fit within the brand.

"We changed the description and the title of the dish to better match our brand, and it made a significant change to its sales, so I was also able to raise the price slightly," Ted notes.

## Keeping Everyone on Board

Outside of the culinary teams, Crooked Hammock and La Vida Hospitality have found even more value with MarginEdge since they first became users.

Their accountants have benefited from using the Bill Pay feature, as well as integrating labor data through their POS for a more complete view of Prime Costs. Ted explains, "The accountants are the ones that are benefiting the most from Bill Pay and it's an amazing feature to automatically have our bills paid. I know it's saving our accounting team a ton of time which then has



**I like trusting experts, and MarginEdge is an expert when it comes to cost control, understanding your menu, understanding your purchases, and understanding your profits."**

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given them a chance to work on other really important projects."

Their accounting teams now have more time for key initiatives like evaluating vendors and making sure they're getting the best price for everything that they buy. Ted says, "It also allows us to streamline systems so that we're not doing things more than once. You get it right the first time and that's really great. I'm thrilled that we're finally using the bill pay feature."

While changing accounting processes is a daunting task, Ted and their accounting teams have been pleasantly impressed with what MarginEdge provides. He divulges, "We were hesitant at first. I think there's a lot of control that comes with paying your own bills and to give that to someone else can be a very nerve-racking experience but so far MarginEdge has been great. They're super communicative and some features give you guardrails so that things don't go too far off the rails. It's great."

## **The (Not-So) Crooked Path Forward**

While La Vida Hospitality is quickly growing with its sights set on more future locations in the

Carolinas, they are constantly trying to improve everything about their brands. Ted notes, "Each new location adds something special, and so I hope that with new locations we'll get to install some outdoor cooking stations or maybe a backyard brick oven pizza."

Along with new concepts and locations opening, the Crooked Hammock team is also focusing on building their retail footprint to perfectly pair with their memorable and guest-favorite brands. "We've got a brand new lineup of apparel every season. I'm always wearing it and I know our guests do too," Ted says.

And as they grow, MarginEdge will be with them every step of the way. Overall, Ted couldn't be happier with MarginEdge. In fact, he'd recommend it to anyone, even small restaurants. In his words, "MarginEdge automates so many tasks and gives you so much insight into your business. In the past, I'd do all of this stuff by hand or on spreadsheets. It takes so much time and so much work, and I don't always have confidence that I get the formulas right or that I put it all together correctly. So, I like trusting experts, and MarginEdge is an expert when it comes to cost control, understanding your menu, understanding your purchases, and understanding your profits. It's great." 🍷