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Fast-food ratings improve in 2009

SAN CLEMENTE, CALIF. —Regional fast-food brands, such as In-N-Out, Raising Cane's and Penn Station, continue to capture the highest customer satisfaction ratings, according to Sandelman & Associates. The good news is a majority of chains improved their ratings this year. In all, 69 percent of 140 fast-food chains monitored had a higher overall "excellent" rating in 2009 than in 2008.

In-N-Out Burger, the privately owned hamburger chain in a few Western states that has an extremely loyal following, receives top honors in Sandelman & Associates' **2009 Quick-Track Awards of Excellence**. Impressively, 62 percent of its recent customers rated their last visit "excellent" overall. Capriotti's of Las Vegas virtually tied In-N-Out for top overall rating.

A couple of sizable national chains performed well. Atlanta-based chicken chain Chick-fil-A finished in third. Fully 59 percent of those who recently patronized the chain rated their last visit "excellent" overall. With 1,400-plus units, Chick-fil-A is the largest of the chains in the Top 10. St. Louis-based Panera Bread garners a 5th place finish, notable since it operates 1,300-plus units. In all, 140 quick-service chains were monitored by Sandelman & Associates in 2009.

The **Top 10 chains** rated "excellent" overall in Sandelman & Associates' Quick-Track study are:

Quick-Service Restaurant Chain	Home Base	% "excellent" overall rating for last occasion
1. In-N-Out Burger	Irvine, Calif.	62%
1. Capriotti's	Las Vegas	62%
3. Chick-fil-A	Atlanta	59%
4. Raising Cane's	Baton Rouge, La.	57%
5. Panera Bread	St. Louis	57%
6. Pei Wei	Scottsdale, Ariz.	56%
7. Giordano's Pizza	Chicago	55%
8. Cafe Rio	Salt Lake City	55%
9. Idaho Pizza Company	Boise, Idaho	54%
10. Penn Station	Cincinnati	53%

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“Fast-food chains are better at meeting consumers’ wants and needs in these trying times. The chains have focused on improving both quality and value,” says Bob Sandelman, CEO and founder of Sandelman & Associates. “Our Awards of Excellence winners, many of whom are smaller, regional brands, are raising the bar and fast-food giants are responding.”

Awards of Excellence are given for overall satisfaction and for different aspects of the dining experience, such as taste of the food, speed of service and value for the money. Southern California’s In-N-Out Burger maintains its following partly because of its tasty food: the chain has the No. 2 “excellent” rating on taste of the food. Again it earns top-rated scores for quality of the ingredients, friendliness of the staff, accuracy in filling orders and being “a place for someone like me.” In all, In-N-Out finished in the Top 3 on eight of 15 attributes monitored.

The chain with the most U.S. units, Subway, is highest rated for healthy and nutritious food. Sales leader McDonald’s is best when it comes to appeal to kids. Little Caesars garners the top spot for value and affordability. When it comes to speed of service, Jimmy John’s “freaky fast” positioning is paying off: It is No. 1 on that measure.

Growing chain Raising Cane’s shines when it comes to service and operations, garnering Top 3 “excellent” ratings on temperature of the food, accuracy in filling orders, cleanliness and appeal to kids. Penn Station, a sub sandwich favorite in the Midwest, finishes in the Top 3 on three characteristics: taste or flavor of the food, quality of the ingredients and temperature of the food.

The awards are based on the quarterly syndicated Quick-Track® research program conducted by Sandelman & Associates, a San Clemente, Calif.-based market research firm that tracks attitudes, awareness and usage for the restaurant industry. The Quick-Track Awards of Excellence are based on ratings provided by the study’s respondents on fast-food chains they visited in the past three months. In all, Quick-Track surveyed more than 90,900 quick-service restaurant users in 78 U.S. markets during 2009.

Information from this press release must be accompanied by a statement identifying Sandelman & Associates as the publisher and Quick-Track as the source. The information contained in this press release cannot be used for advertising, public relations or promotional purposes without the express prior written consent of Sandelman & Associates. *For more findings, call Paul Clarke at (847) 277-7603 or E-mail paul@sandelman.com.*

About The Study

Quick-Track® is a syndicated research study that tracks key consumer behavioral and attitudinal measures for all major fast-food and pizza chains in individual markets. This research program has been conducted on a quarterly basis since 1988 by Sandelman & Associates, a San Clemente, Calif.-based market research firm. During 2009, Quick-Track surveys were conducted in 78 major

markets across the U.S. among a total sample of 90,900 fast-food users. Respondents provide an overall rating of their last purchase occasion for each tracked chain they have patronized in the past three months. They also rate selected chains they have patronized in the past three months on 15 key attributes that define a chain's image, including food, service, cleanliness, convenience and value. A five-point rating scale is used, with "1" being "poor" and "5" being "excellent." The scores reported equal the percentage of patrons giving an "excellent" rating (top-box score). To ensure reliability, data is reported only for those chains that were rated by at least 150 past-three-month users. For some chains, the sample of respondents providing an overall rating was sufficient, but the base providing ratings on specific attributes was below the 150 minimum requirement and attribute ratings for those chains are not included in the report. Importance ratings for the same 15 attributes are provided by the quarterly Quick-Track National study, which was conducted among nearly 2,400 quick-service restaurant users in 2009. Respondents rate the importance of each attribute in their selection of a fast-food or pizza restaurant, with "1" being "not at all important" and "5" being "extremely important."