

BUSINESS



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FALL ISSUE
GLOBAL GAME CHANGERS

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Hard Work, Dedication,
and DeVotion

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Developer Shandee Chernow Disrupts Innovation by Creating Software for Individuals with Severe Food Allergies



Can you tell us about your personal battle with food allergies?

I developed my food allergies starting at the age of 28, and my first reaction was to pork. It's a tricky one because it's not a particularly common allergen and it's a super common ingredient. Pork also masquerades by a lot of other names, like bacon, pancetta, prosciutto, etc. Having food allergies makes dining out or going to other people's houses very challenging; I don't want to be a painful guest, but I also want to enjoy food like other people are able to. You try to figure out, in as covert a way as possible, what you can have or if you'll be able to eat anything. You also have to explain to at least one person what to look for if you have a reaction and what to do. It's a unique challenge for adults with food allergies – you're not under the care of someone else the way that a child would be, so you have to advocate for yourself. plicabo.

CertiStar was founded in 2017 by game changer, Shandee Chernow. Shandee discovered in her late 20s, she had severe food allergies, so you can imagine how frustrating it was for her to dine-out. She created CertiStar, a restaurant software, as a disruptive solution that allows for food allergic guests to dine at a restaurant in a safer and easier way. The software allows the restaurant to enter in the item(s) the guest is allergic to, then pulls up everything "safe" they can eat off the menu.

"Even in the best of circumstances, there was an element of luck to eating safely in restaurants."

What motivated you to create CertiStar?

I was selling software to large corporations and found myself out to eat very frequently in the process. I would arrive at the restaurants early and try to have "The Conversation" before my customers would arrive so as to be as non-disruptive as possible to the meal and conversation. Even in the best of circumstances, there was an element of luck to eating safely in restaurants. Eventually, I figured there must be a better way to determine what I could eat besides relying on someone's knowledge in the middle of a busy lunch or dinner service. So I found one, and created the company around it.

Disruptive innovation has become a game changer in the tech industry. Tell us about the "process" of creating CertiStar

Traditionally what happens in a restaurant experience for a food allergic customer is to have a conversation with the server, manager and/or chef of the restaurant. The average conversation takes between 8 and 12 minutes and involves up to four people. All that to figure out, generally, one thing that the person can have. The problem for the restaurant is that the table takes longer to turn over (more time) and that guest generally orders less than the average guest (less money).

The process now is that the guest or the server has access to CertiStar, which near-instantly creates an individual menu for the guest with a complete list of allergen friendly options for them. So we're making it faster, less stigmatized and opening up appetizer/entrée/side/dessert options for the guest. Less time, more money, and a happy, newly loyal customer!

More and more people are developing food allergies; as children and adults. What advice would you give those who struggle with allergies?

Request that they use CertiStar everywhere you go! Living food allergic can be super challenging, and it's also tiring because it's all day every day. Keep on advocating for yourself, your children, your friends, etc. Teach as many people as you can about how to use the epinephrine auto injectors (a trainer comes with them often times!) as they may use one to save your or someone else's lives one day. Don't be afraid to tell people about your allergies; the more people who are aware of what a widespread issue food allergies are, the less stigma and more conversation we can have.

