

CHEESY GOODNESS

The secret history of online pizza tracking

"Domino's, the pizza-delivery kingpin, today will unveil a technology, Pizza Tracker, that lets customers literally track their pizza from the moment they place the order until it leaves the store en route to them." —USA TODAY, JAN. 30, 2008



1993

DOMINO'S DISCONTINUES its 30-minute delivery guarantee, citing "driver safety." The true reason is a closely guarded corporate secret: Research reveals that customers spend as much as 27 minutes out of a 30-minute delivery cycle in a frenzy of agitation. "Where is it?" a focus-group subject now known only as "Diner Zero" asks. "Do I go out and meet the car or what?" Domino's execs vow to bring back the 30-minute window, but only if they can stanch "the terrible pressure of not knowing."



1994

A DREAM TEAM of technical experts is assembled at corporate HQ in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The new medium of the Internet is explored. Special orders are tricky: Early text-only Web browsers force test subjects to sketch their desired result in ASCII art. "There's no good way," one PhD grumbles, "to represent crumbled sausage." Worse, it takes up to six days to transmit these crude graphics over 14.4 baud modems, during which time it is feared consumers may starve, or even cook for themselves.



1999

DESPERATE FOR FRESH THINKING, the company convenes a secret conclave of academicians. A faction from the University of Chicago advocates what comes to be called "deep-dish bandwidth," or enough systemic capacity to accommodate "everybody on the near West Side ordering in from Lou Malnati's at the same instant." A group from NYU counters with the "Neapolitan paradigm," in which a large number of smaller transmitting nodes are spread thinly across the map. Not even a shared contempt for the UCLA contingent, proselytizing for froufrou coaxial technology made from local, fresh-picked raw materials, can bring them together.

2002

PRESIDENT BUSH, though well known to be a hot-wings man, sends counselor James Baker to Ann Arbor to push for a delivery breakthrough before the midterm elections. "This is too important," the President tells Baker. "Dammit, I get my pizza brought up in an elevator from downstairs. I mean, I make a call, and it's here, eight minutes tops. What about the American people?" Baker, suffering the ill effects of a red-eye back to D.C. and an experimental dessert pizza made from Oreo cookies, reports back to the President: "Now all we can do is pray."



2007

BREAKTHROUGH. A radical faction of white-hat hackers at the company's Futuristics Lab devises a plan to wire 3,400 in-store ovens with fiber optics, lash them via a high-speed WAN to a matrix of geostationary C-band comsats, and control the whole system through high-tech operations centers secured behind blast walls at secret locations across the globe. A triumphant Domino's prepares to announce the return of the 30-minute guarantee. When company auditors determine that the system will raise the real cost of a 12" Classic Hand Tossed pizza with two toppings to just under



\$6,000, an executive asks rhetorically, "How much would you pay for peace of mind?" A grateful nation agrees, and goes to its computers and orders. To go.