

Technology Trends Take Off

By Christie Simo

Let's face it: technology is a crucial part of operating a restaurant, and it's here to stay. However, technology also moves at a pace that's hard to keep up with, especially when you're trying to manage employees, oversee product orders and develop marketing to get people in the doors. We're here to help. *Restaurant Forum* magazine looked at six key areas of restaurant management, noting recent trends and products that can help you run your restaurant better. For more information on any of the products mentioned below, visit the websites listed at the bottom of each box.

MENU ORDERING

Wireless handheld devices have the potential to transform restaurant point of sale (POS) similar to the way touch-screen technology revolutionized the industry 15 years ago. As credit card security continues to be a concern with diners and within the restaurant industry, many are making their customers feel at ease by



offering table-side ordering systems that keep their credit card safely within sight.

Action Systems, Inc. offers one such option. Its Write-On Handheld software, which was first released in 2001, is now available for use on iPod touch. The iPod touch is fitted with a magnetic strip reader that allows servers to take orders and process payments right at tableside, while also providing customers added

security by keeping the diner's credit card within their sight at all times. Plus, an added bonus is a lower replacement cost for an iPod touch versus a more traditional hardware platform.

Postec has just introduced its SmartTouch cellular system,

which operates on an iPad or iTouch device. Diners can scroll through the restaurants available wine options and search by categories such as region and type of wine to select a wine for their meal. Once the diners have selected their wine, the sommelier is notified through the system and returns to the table to take their beverage request.

Using such handheld devices can help boost check averages and decrease table turnover times and labor costs. Employees no longer have to write down orders then re-enter them into the POS kiosk. Instead, they enter it directly into the handheld device, which sends the orders to the kitchen automatically.

For more information, visit www.actionsystems.com and www.postec.com.

SECURITY/LOSS PREVENTION

Loss prevention is a serious matter, especially in an industry with high employee turnover. As technology has gotten more sophisticated, so have the restaurant scams and theft schemes.

Retail Data Systems recently introduced Aloha Restaurant Guard, an application that helps restaurant operators better control operations and increase their profit by as much as 5%. The system monitors all operations in real time, generating reports that identify trends consistent with more than a dozen restaurant scams to help stop profit losses and minimize the effects of fraudulent behavior. It looks at 12 months worth of data to identify consistent trends and abnormalities that could be fraud detectors.

Visit www.rdspos.com for more information.

DIGITAL SIGNAGE

Digital signage is becoming so commonplace that customers are beginning to expect it in their restaurants too.

By incorporating digital signage into your restaurant and existing POS system, you can update menu items and prices automatically. Employees can focus on customer service and food prep rather than manually changing the menu every day. You can also use the digital boards to feature current store promotions and create custom graphics to help build your brand identity.

Some signs can be interactive, engaging the customer and gathering information from them in an entertaining manner, or even providing a direct means to contact management in the event of a problem.

Postec's Digital Menu Board offerings help restaurant owners update menu and price changes for different times of the day, or to showcase dynamic promotions in place of single static images.