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How New Technologies Can Benefit Your Restaurant

By Nicholas Radice

Technology can change the face of business overnight, but you'd never know it from the looks of many independent restaurants. For example, many indies still use POS systems that print out paper orders in the kitchen, instead of displaying orders on computer screens. A few don't even have POS systems, relying instead on the good handwriting skills of their employees to convey to the kitchen exactly what a customer has requested. These old school methods of order taking are rife with potential for error and can make doing business as usual far more difficult than it needs to be for employees at both front and back of house.

What's available today for front of house, in particular, is user friendly, practical, and, often times, less expensive than owners may think. Updating your restaurant to incorporate newer technologies – even in small ways – can result in big rewards for your business.

POS systems

A point of sale (POS) system can be found in almost every restaurant today. Modern POS systems include all the hardware and software needed to enter an order and display it for kitchen staff. Some systems even perform additional tasks such as recording inventory counts and labor costs.

Newer POS systems can be found on handheld devices, which allow the server to take orders directly at tables. This method eliminates mistakes due to poor note taking and allows the server to turn tables more quickly with the elimination of extra steps going back and forth to a stationary POS system. This convenience also allows the server to spend more time with the guests to help make their overall dining experience more personal.

There are also a number of restaurants using customer-facing displays. Imagine walking into a restaurant and, prior to sitting down, placing your order yourself. Ordering is put in the hands of the customer and therefore the ordering process is simplified and there are few, if any, mistakes. Some other customer-facing displays are actually installed directly onto the table or attached to it in some way, allowing a guest to browse through the menu without actually holding one, reducing printing costs.

Paging systems

Cell phone-based paging systems are inexpensive and quite efficient. The idea is simple: When a party enters a restaurant and there is a wait for a table, the host or hostess takes a person's cell phone number as a point of contact. Some paging systems will display an estimated wait time to the cell user. When the party's table is ready, the paging system sends a call to the contact's cell phone with an automated message announcing that the table is ready.

Because traditional pagers have a limited range, this kind of system works well for restaurants in shopping centers, which guests tend to explore while they wait. But if a paging system is helpful to a restaurant, no matter its locale, cell phone-paging systems clearly lower costs by minimizing pager loss and repair/replacement.



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