

Restaurant POS systems

How they can help deal with the rush

Tired of dealing with undecipherable, grease-stained order slips? Are your servers wearing out the carpet with repeated trips to the kitchen and bar? Would you like to know for sure how much cheese to order next week - instead of just going by a hunch? Then you're ready to invest in a restaurant POS system.

A point of sale (POS) system can give you a new level of control over your restaurant operations, helping you increase efficiency, boost profits, and fine-tune inventory management. Switching from a traditional cash register and paper-based orders to a computerized POS system can be hard, but the return on investment can really make it worth your time and effort.

What is a restaurant POS system?

In the most basic sense, a POS system is a glorified cash register. The typical restaurant POS station consists of a computer and cash drawer, a receipt printer, and a touch-screen monitor. Most restaurants have several such stations, with additional components depending on the type of restaurant.

For retail-style restaurants like sub shops, POS systems often include printers in the food preparation area, eliminating the errors that can happen when hastily-scrawled orders are passed back to the kitchen.

POS systems for table-service restaurants and fine dining are somewhat different. These systems need to be set up with your menu and seating plan so they can communicate orders to the kitchen and bar, track reservations and seating, and handle transactions.

Fine dining POS systems typically include more stations: multiple server stations, a bar station, a hostess station, and printers in the kitchen than more basic POS systems. They also have more functionality -- including the ability to create and store open checks, let servers send "fire" orders to the kitchen to start the next course, as well as track which server is responsible for which table.

Restaurant POS benefits

POS systems can greatly reduce the amount of time your staff spends in the kitchen and speed up the order process. The efficiency gains can be impressive. If a restaurant with 20 tables and an average check of \$45 can increase turnover by one party per table, that is an extra \$900 on a busy night. Additional savings come from reduced shrinkage: servers can't provide complimentary food to friends without entering them in the system.

In addition to the direct cost savings, restaurant POS systems offer detailed reports that can help you make more informed business decisions. Sales reports help you better predict volume and schedule employees appropriately. Inventory reports help you order the right ingredients week after week, cutting down on wastage. And order reports let you see which items are most popular, which items generate the most profit, and which items you should probably drop from your menu.

Frequent diner programs, which have primarily been the domain of large chain restaurants, can now work for small restaurants, thanks to POS systems. These programs, which reward return visitors with incentives or discounts, are rapidly growing in popularity. Examples include point systems that work much like frequent flyer miles - each item on the menu has a point value associated with it. Diners accumulate points that can be later exchanged for a free desert, half price special, or dollars off their meal. By assigning higher point values, you can give a boost to high-profit or low-performing items. You can also market to customers based on their typical purchase or time of visit.