

Sizzlin' News

Handheld Solutions: Mobilizing The Manager

Handheld devices have carved out a niche as portable point-of-sale solutions for restaurants, empowering servers to transmit paperless orders to the kitchen without running back and forth to stationary POS terminals, thus speeding service and boosting volume. Now, encouraged by advances in handheld computing power and connectivity, some operators are discovering new roles for handhelds - as mobile management tools useful for a variety of communication and operational functions.

Handheld POS units help San Francisco-based Simco Group, operator of tourist-destination eateries like Pier Market Seafood and Chic's Seafood on the city's Pier 39, squeeze in more table turns on busy summer weekend days. According to director of operations Bob Partrite, replacing some dining room POS terminals with server-carried Symbol MC-50 handhelds running Digital Dining POS software speeds up service enough to reap an 8-percent to 11-percent increase on sales, even on days when the dining room is already running continual waiting lines for tables.

However, today's handhelds promise much more. They're playing a pivotal role in the broader trend of workplace mobilization. Spurred by competitive pressures to increase productivity, more companies are outfitting employees with handheld devices - PDAs, pocket PCs and Smartphones - to keep them in touch with customers and the corporate office via voice and email and to help them access web-based databases to do business functions on the road. The mobile worker population is projected to increase from more than 650 million worldwide in 2004 to more than 850 million in 2009, according to the analyst firm IDC, based in Framingham, Mass. By the end of that forecast period, more than 70 percent of the U.S. workforce is expected to be mobile equipped, according to IDC.




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It's little wonder that a growing number of restaurant operators, particularly in the coffee-shop and fast-casual segments, offer free WiFi service for mobile-minded patrons. Nor is it much of a leap for some operators to adopt mobile management themselves.

Managers someday will use handhelds to track inventory of food packages with attached RFID [radio frequency ID] tags, which will send radio signals to sensors as they are removed from the freezer, walk-in or shelf, Hall predicted. "They'll know exactly how much food is in the freezer, and they'll get an alert when supply gets low," Hall said. "Look for this to come to the big chain restaurants first."

Machine-to-machine communication - essentially the interplay of handhelds or PCs connected to restaurant equipment with sensors and wireless transmitters - can help managers avoid a variety of disastrous scenarios. For example, consider the advantage of having a handheld networked to wireless temperature transmitters attached to the kitchen's freezer and walk-in coolers. A manager receives an alert on his PDA saying the freezer temperature is 36 degrees Fahrenheit and rising, indicating an open cooler door or mechanical malfunction.

A similar security alert could be triggered by a wireless sensor indicating that the back door is ajar or a cash register drawer is open, also ways to prevent or minimize trouble in the restaurant. 

Source: Nation's Restaurant News

Nine Ideas To Warm Up Your Foodservice Sales And Margins - And Help You Hit The Ground Running For The Summer Selling Season

Here are nine ideas that can help get your foodservice bottom line in order, courtesy of Deborah Holand, President of Food-Sense, a foodservice consulting business with extensive experience in the convenience store channel.

1

Focused promotions. Create promotions that boost average tickets — not just offer price reductions. Provide a little spice in your menu for 30 days, or create a three-item combo that drives throughput while increasing labor productivity.

2

Develop a penny profit matrix. Plot your menu items on a “stars” and “dogs” matrix, with daily quantities sold vs. penny profit per item. Find ways to drive your “dogs” into the “stars” column — or else get rid of them. Promote the stars, reset the benchmark and re-plot the matrix. Do this again in the spring.

3

Become a menu engineer. Take a hard look at any food item with more than 10 ingredients, five production steps or 10-minute prep times. Complex menus will kill your profits. Drop the labor hogs now to benefit from increased productivity and reduced waste. Look to add unique, longer-shelf-life items.

4

Do trash can audits. Track waste daily in every prep area. Use waste containers, weigh them daily and watch your food costs shrink.

5

Practice the five storage rules. These are the cardinal rules of food labeling, to be observed without fail: label, date, initial, cover and rotate. Use “thaw and discard” or “Use By” labels and be in 100% HACCP compliance.

6

Pre-portion wherever possible. Don't get hung up on the labor and packaging costs to pre-portion. Focus on high cost and short holding time items. Opening, closing and cleanup times will be more efficient and you'll reduce overall costs.

7

Be ruthless about waste reduction. Use scales and constantly spot audit weights. Planogram prep tables with specific measurements. Track waste on top commodities religiously and formalize production schedules. Every inventory item in storage should have at least five uses, while every prepped item should have second- or third-use cycles.

8

Use activity-based costing. Consider investing in costing and inventory software if you don't have it already, because it pays dividends immediately. Know the facts: True profit can be measured only on a fully loaded P&L, with each menu item including labor, waste factor, packaging and direct facility expenses.

9

Drill down on productivity. Manage labor hourly, by daypart — not daily or weekly. Invest in time-clock software and post productivity results hourly. Consider an incentive-based bonus program.

Setting high standards and building strong habits among your personnel will help fatten your foodservice bottom line now, and position you for new performance benchmarks when the weather turns warmer. **fb**

Source: Convenience Store Decisions