Restaurateurs and caterers are looking to high-tech EPOS systems to meet consumer demand for fast, efficient, personalised service. But it’s crucial they don’t forget the importance of good, old-fashioned human interaction.

Convenience is King for today’s consumers; waiting at any point during the dining process is one of their biggest bugbears, with a recent study by Oracle finding that 84% of diners think fast, efficient service is the single most important factor when they visit a restaurant, bar or coffee shop.

At the same time, consumers are getting more and more used to personalised service in all aspects of their lives, whether that’s series recommendations on Netflix or product suggestions on Amazon.

For these reasons, more and more hospitality operators – from QSR to workplace and healthcare catering providers – are looking to high-tech EPOS systems to not only speed service in their outlets, but also help them deliver the highly personalised service consumers are coming to expect. Added bonuses include reduced operational costs and increased revenue.

Tablesided ordering and payment

Over the past few years mobile POS devices that waiters can bring to the table have rapidly grown in popularity within restaurants. As staff don’t have to run back and forth from the table to the kitchen to deliver orders, they are likely to be more accurate and reach the customer faster, which also allows operators to turn around more tables.

As the 2018 ‘Technology at the Table’ GO Technology report from Zonal and CGA found, two in five (41%) diners say this enhances their overall experience, over half (54%) believe it makes the ordering process quicker and a third (33%) think their orders arrive faster.

In fact, the GO Technology report found that of those who didn’t believe tableside ordering enhanced their experience, two in five (41%) thought it impersonal, or that servers with tablets don’t interact as much as they would like.

As Zonal’s sales and marketing director Clive Consterdine says, “What will stand the test of time is nothing to do with technology, but good old-fashioned human interaction.”
Healthcare applications

This idea also translates to the healthcare setting, where more operators are implementing electronic bedside ordering systems.

Patients can be taken through the entire menu, make requests for substitutions and add 'write-ins, as well as placing orders for meals on demand. Having greater control over meals, results in patients reporting dramatically increased satisfaction with their hospital stay and improves nutrient intake for better outcomes. The cost benefits can be significant too, with hospitals using Vision Software’s menu ordering system reporting a 4% reduction in food costs and an additional 4% reduction in non-food expenses due to improved overall efficiency.

Ideal for this scenario is a cook and chill system, like the one offered by RATIONAL’s SelfCookingCenter. Its Finishing capability means that food can be prepared in advance when there’s time to do so and brought to consumption temperature in just a few minutes when the patient is ready for their meal.

At the same time, self-service kiosks, such as the ones provided by ordering and payment systems provider Systopia, which specialises in workplace catering, meet consumers need for speed. With the average employee spending only 17 minutes on their lunch break, this is more important than ever.

As the company’s head of marketing and business development Karen Lillywhite predicts, “We are expecting self-service to continue to grow in popularity due to the growing focus on convenience and speed. Our self-service kiosks are also helping foodservice providers to reduce queuing time and better manage their resources.”

Personalised experiences

For catering businesses to really benefit from mobile POS and self-service kiosks, they must be integrated with the operation’s main EPOS systems.

Crucial to the success of any mobile app is that it integrates with a business’s EPOS system.

That way the information gathered tableside, or through the kiosks, or smartphone apps about customers’ dining preferences can be used by caterers to personalise their experience at their next visit, or to tailor future marketing promotions to each diner, increasing the probability of a return visit.

James Slatter, EMEA managing director for Agilys comments, “For the past two years, we’ve seen a shift toward personalised experiences. It’s not news that being able to address a customer’s need will positively affect their satisfaction. Today it’s more about the overall experience, and less seen as a one-time interaction. A customer experience is a more holistic approach that aims to create loyal customers, keep them happy, and always leave them with a positive impression.”

Putting control in the hands of the diner

Self-service – whether through a fixed kiosk or a customer’s mobile phone – is another fast-growing trend in the restaurant and catering world.

“For many retailers it is about reducing their wage bills by not requiring their staff to be present for all stages of the customer’s ordering process,” says Jonathan Lee, product manager at cloud-hosted hospitality software company Guestline. “This is dependent on the level of service that the business wishes to offer but could as a result boost efficiency and decrease operation costs.”

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