

ORDER KIOSKS PROVE TO BE ONE SOLUTION FOR LABOR SHORTAGE

When customers order, staff can focus on food and service.

Restaurateurs are struggling harder than ever to find and retain good employees. Proof that the labor pool is shallow: In April 2019, U.S. unemployment dipped to a remarkable 50-year low of 3.6 percent. Rising hourly wages — surpassing national and many state minimums by 100 percent in some cases — are slashing profits, and even some employees who do sign on often don't stay long. According to some accounts, turnover rates in U.S. restaurants are as high as 150 percent annually.

It's not surprising that customer-facing order kiosks are becoming increasingly popular options to offset labor challenges. Using automated kiosks, customers can place their own orders and pay for them without employee assistance. Staff is then freed up to focus more on food and direct customer service.



Posiflex Business Machines, a leading manufacturer of order kiosks and POS terminals for the foodservice industry, is introducing a new line of customer-facing terminals

that enables restaurant guests to order for themselves. Doyle Ledford, vice president of sales for the Hayward, Calif.-based company, spoke with Nation's Restaurant News about the positive impacts increased kiosk use are making on restaurants.



Nation's Restaurant News: A clear benefit of kiosk use is that it removes the work of order taking from the staff.

Doyle Ledford: Right. Not only does placing an order take a considerable amount of time, multiply that times the number of orders per day, and the benefit of a self-service kiosk becomes crystal clear. Alleviating some of the time-consuming order-taking will allow staff to focus on providing better service.

NRN: Is there any concern about order accuracy when the customer is in control?

DL: Research shows that customers' orders can easily get entered inaccurately when taken by a staff member — especially in the case of substitutions and multiple orders placed in a single transaction. We've also learned that customers are more likely to review their order more carefully [when using a kiosk]. Another benefit is with more

accurate orders — restaurants see reduced waste from mistaken orders and save considerable costs.

NRN: Surely some operators are thinking kiosks might be expensive to add, even more so than the cost of employee turnover. How true is that assumption?

DL: They may seem like equipment that is “nice to have” or feel like an expense tailored for larger chains only. No matter how large or small an establishment is, kiosks optimize efficiency, increase staff productivity, reduce wait times, increase traffic and, as a result, save significant costs.

The expense to purchase a kiosk also has decreased significantly due to the advent of ready-made kiosks. Establishments can get up-and-running quickly without spending the lengthy time and cost it typically takes to build a custom-made kiosk.

NRN: When the customer becomes responsible for placing an order, is there a risk of customer wait times as they learn the process?

DL: Kiosks have proven to reduce longer lines by redirecting some traffic to self-service rather than waiting at the counter. In turn, wait times are greatly reduced and customers are less frustrated, leading to a better overall experience for guests and staff.

NRN: How quickly do customers become accustomed to order kiosks?

DL: Just as people are accustomed to using ATMs since they're quicker and more convenient than using a teller, a similar familiarization for kiosks in restaurants will eventually follow. Speed becomes more common with loyal customers who consistently order the same items. They know what they want, they've ordered it before and punching in a new order becomes second nature.

NRN: How does a kiosk help consumers customize their orders?

DL: A QSR cashier may ask, "Do you want fries with that?" But with a kiosk a customer can view all options

for those fries: extra salt, curly fries, sweet potato, extra spicy and so on. A cashier or even a digital menu board may not be able to list all the options available to the customer — but a kiosk can. The opportunity to customize orders expands an establishment's menu exponentially. Allowing patrons to customize on their own becomes an added benefit.

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NRN: Online order ticket averages increase because customers see their options clearly. Does the same happen with order kiosks?

DL: When a user has a large touch-screen with easy access to a restaurant's full menu and with promotional items prominently displayed in front of them, it becomes increasingly enticing to explore and add further items to the order.

NRN: Large chain restaurants such as Panera Bread, Dunkin, Subway, Wendy's and McDonald's are rolling out large kiosk programs. What does that say about this trend?

DL: Larger chains are already deploying kiosks in droves, with many installations already past the testing phase and now in full deployment. So, it is evident, these larger chains already have done their due diligence in researching kiosks' viability in foodservice. Kiosks are now a competitive feature rather than a nice-to-have feature. ■

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