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POS Software Upgrades & Updates

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When it comes to shopping for point of sale (POS) software, increased flexibility and functionality rank at the top of operators' lists. "Basic transaction processing isn't enough anymore," says Rob Ireland, IT director of Boone, N.C.-based Tar Heel Capital, which operates 77 franchised Wendy's units in North Carolina and South Carolina. "Having a solution that makes it easier to serve customers efficiently, boost order accuracy and maintain a handle on other factors, such as cost, is a must these days."



Vendors appear to be keeping this in mind in developing new and upgraded POS software solutions. For example, some players have begun to deliver increased flexibility in the form of applications with a conversational order acceptance feature that directs servers in entering customers' orders exactly as they are placed. This eliminates the need to navigate between screens to locate a match to the way orders are verbalized and allows order information to be modified, whatever the sequence in which it is keyed in.¶¶¶

NextGen POS, just released by WAND Corporation (www.wandcorp.com), offers conversational order acceptance capabilities, along with the option of making minor changes to orders and correcting simple cashier mistakes on the fly, without manager acceptance. Tar Heel Capital tested the software in one of its stores this past spring. Deployment to 32 additional units whose Windows-based POS hardware configuration will support its use is now underway.

"We're definitely seeing far fewer voids and much faster, much better service with the system in place," Ireland states. "Employees no longer interrupt customers to find out, for example, which beverage they want with a combo or whether they want certain condiments, only to forget something else. And if customers correct themselves mid-order, for example, saying they want two cheeseburgers with lettuce and one without rather than three with lettuce on three different combos, the software automatically adjusts the quantities."

NCR Corp. (www.ncr.com) has also jumped on the conversational ordering bandwagon, incorporating it into Version 7.06 of the Compris Restaurant Suite along with such additional features as biometric employee log-in via finger-scanning and support for VIVOTECH (www.vivotech) payment devices. A new in-store editing function enables store-level editing of menu and pricing information.

Orders from near and far

Other efforts to render POS solutions more flexible involve upgrades to accommodate remote ordering and mobile point-of-sale. For example, Intura Vision 4.0, the 2008 version of Intura Solutions' (www.intura.com) restaurant POS software, has a remote order interface module that handles orders placed online and from call centers, kiosks and mobile devices. The system now accepts split tender and integrates with more than 12 gift card processors.

AccuPOS Food Service 2008, introduced by Attitude Positive (www.AccuPOS.com), also features a Web interface for online order acceptance, while Version 8 of the Maitre'D solution from Posera Software (www.maitredpos.com) is configured for optional call center integration. The latter, built with the Microsoft SQL 2008 database and set to launch this September, also offers a new cash management module, among other accoutrements.

Also paving the way for remote ordering is SoftTouch POS (www.softtouchpos.com) which in July unveiled a solution called DineBlast iOrder. When customers walk into a restaurant with iPhones, iPods, PDAs, mobile phones or similar communication devices in hand, the software detects a wireless connection and automatically brings up the establishment's home page. Diners may then use their devices to interact directly with the SoftTouch POS system, for example, placing orders from their cell phones before servers visit the table. Payments may also be executed through the system, using any personal communication device.

Meanwhile, Agilysys, Inc. (www.agilysys.com) has added the mPOS application to its InfoGenesis suite of point of sale products. Promoted as particularly well-suited for poolside bar, stadium and arena environments, the software enables mobile payment acceptance on (www.motorola.com) Motorola's hand-held devices.

Elsewhere on the flexibility front, vendors continue to roll out solutions and upgrades that increase operator convenience and, in some cases, pave the way for a better customer experience by allowing tasks other than transaction processing to be handled within the POS system. Menusoft Systems (www.digitaldining.com) ranks among these companies. Release 7.3.5 of its Digital Dining solution incorporates an optional reservations module.

Jose's Noodle Factory, which has two -- Digital Dining handheld units in Leamington and Windsor, Ontario, plans to begin using the module in the next few months, notes Donny Pacheco, manager. "By booking reservations from within the POS system, we'll definitely be able to better serve customers because we'll have access to information about their past purchases and will be able to tie it in to their visit," Pacheco notes. "For example, if we're having a specific promotion on a certain day and someone calls to book, we can say something on the phone like, 'We see you like 'xx' and are going to be featuring it when you visit. It creates a personnel connection that we're sure will be great for business."

Labor tools

For its part, FireFly Technologies (www.fireflypos.com) has upgraded its Phoenix POS application

to include a labor management module. Phoenix POS Version 5, launched this past June, allows employees to request time off from within the POS system. Managers are alerted of schedule restrictions as they build the schedule. Employee break-rules can be established based on shift length and enforced within the system, so that staff members who are not scheduled for breaks cannot log out of the system and managers can be alerted should employees neglect to log out for mandatory breaks.

Similarly, new from pcAmerica (www.pcamerica.com) is a labor scheduler tool enhancement to its Restaurant Pro Express solution. The system also handles scheduling requests and enforces break rules, among other functions.

The custom approach

New and enhanced POS applications whose individual components may be customized in-store are hitting the market this year as well. Operators utilizing SpeedLine 6.0 from SpeedLine Solutions (www.speedlinesolutions.com), slated for release in late September 2008, will have the option of fully tailoring information on the system's dispatch and ticket screens to suit their specific needs, employing icons or text to highlight critical details. For instance, a pizza parlor might choose to display the number of beverages and side dishes included in each order to prevent delivery slip-ups, while a high-volume restaurant might flag its online orders without displaying side dishes or drinks on the tickets screen. A new Google-style search field facilitates ticket retrieval by customer name, phone number, menu items, payment type, ticket ID and more.

Similarly, PixelPoint POS Version 9, new from PAR Technology Corp. (www.parotech.com), incorporates a "form designer" tool that allows operators to create custom order screens, forced question screens, kiosk screens and others, such as customer displays for dual-screen POS stations and order screens for wireless order taking with PocketPOS. An order screen enhancement allows order screens to be customized via text positioning, button functionality and the addition or elimination of graphics.

In another vein, flexibility in the area of batch settlement is a key feature of Dinerware version 2.8 (www.dinerware.com). This feature permits batches to be settled from any terminal in a restaurant. A touchscreen interface supports terminal capture networks that require batch settlement, without the need to sync or restart the system. Version 2.8 also touts customizable report workbenches and a "coursing" component that enables the tracking and organizing of formal meal courses by customer seat.

Finally, some vendors have recently unveiled POS systems upgrades designed to afford operators heightened control over discounts and pricing while simultaneously affording them more insight into the specific elements of combo and prix fixe meals. Notably, Release 6 of Squirrel Systems' (www.squirrelsystems.com) SquirrelOne POS solution permits operators to create and enforce parameters for substitutions in prix fixe meals; for example, it can be programmed to prevent servers from accepting an order for a more expensive cut of meat rather than the one specified on a set menu. The system also captures detailed order combo meal and prix fixe order information. For instance, rather than indicating that a diner has ordered four combo meals, it shows that two combo meals were ordered with cheeseburgers and Diet Cokes and two with hamburgers and orange soda.

PAR's 2008 release of its InFusion software, scheduled for release in the fourthquarter of 2008, will offer a rules-based discounting feature for creating discounts comprised of multiple item quantities, multiple items and/or multiple prices. Other features already released this year include the ability to make any item a combo with a single keystroke.

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