

Avoid the Traffic Jam

At the recent Uniwell National Distributor conference in Sydney, Karl Karpf guest speaker from Think Dig High Technology Solutions the Austrian designer and manufacturer of the Orderman hand held waiter order entry terminal kept conference attendees fascinated for a couple of hours talking about the history growth and experiences of Orderman in Europe.

The growth of hand held waiter order systems in the hospitality industry in Europe has been phenomenal. There are now more than 15,000 Orderman sites in Europe with an average of 20 new sites being added per day.

Karl attributes the success of Orderman to the companies approach to bringing the Orderman terminals to the market. Think Dig did not just take a hand held PDA and adopt it to the restaurant industry; they looked at the restaurant industry and designed the Orderman terminal from the ground up to suit the rigorous needs of the restaurant industry.

To explain the benefits to a restaurant of installing the Orderman system Karl took the analysis of workers in Salzburg on an hour lunch break. From the moment the diner walks in the restaurant they go through three time periods; the first and third they have no control of, these are the times spent waiting to order, and waiting to pay the bill. They are similar to being caught in a traffic jam, you are ok initially but as the time you are not moving and are not in control of your journey increases then your frustration rises. This is the same as the time spent waiting to place an order and waiting for the bill, the longer you wait the more frustrated you get. The middle period is the time that the diner is in control, the more of this time they have during the lunch break the more happy they will be. Happy diners become frequent customers.

Not only do hand held terminals improve service by providing the waiter with more time to attend tables they also even out time for kitchen staff and improve kitchen staff moral. At the beginning of a lunch period there is a rush of diners coming into the restaurant. With a conventional system the waiter will usually take orders from a number of tables then go to the POS system, enter the orders from these tables and send them through to the kitchen. This results in a rush of orders in the kitchen. With the hand held system the orders are taken from one table then transmitted to the system before moving to the next table resulting in a smooth flow of orders through to the kitchen and giving kitchen staff more time to prepare meals.

Faster service means that guests will either order more or leave earlier resulting in increased sales per guest or faster table turn over and an overall increase in revenue.

An increase in revenue of 10% actually means 30% more profit. The reason for this being that all the overheads such as rent, rates, utility costs and staff wages stay the same so that any increased cost is only in the actual costs of goods sold.

When asked about a colour display on the Orderman similar to PDA displays Karl said it was not planned because one of the high usage areas of Orderman is in outside dining areas and PDA colour displays can not be easily viewed in daylight.

When asked about the high cost of Orderman compared to the cost of a PDA that can be bought in stores like K-Mart, Karl asked if the restaurant also bought their dishwasher, coffee machine and chef's knives in K-Mart indicating that the quality comparison was the same. "We don't have a problem with our customers paying a higher up front price because the equipment is so rugged and reliable that it works out to be much cheaper to own in the long run." "Because the Orderman is purpose built it can only be used in the restaurant and not for other uses such as a personal organizer so they don't tend to go missing"; Karl concluded.