

Buying a new System

When the time comes to invest in a new POS system for a restaurant one of the tasks owners/managers are set with is determining the suitability, reliability, and efficiency of a prospective new system.

How do you determine if the system does the job and is as reliable as the supplier says it is? It doesn't matter how long you spend looking at a system it's only when you finally get it installed and operational that you really find out if it does the job efficiently and gives you the information that you need.

When users go looking for a new system they often ask for referrals from any prospective supplier and will be given names and phone numbers of current system users to contact. If they follow up on the referrals they will often receive a positive report of how the system has improved turnover and makes the business run so much smoother.

The simple fact is that no equipment supplier is going to give you referrals from customers that for one reason or another are not happy with their system.

A manager that has spent thousands of dollars of the business owner's money on a system that is not up to scratch is probably never going to tell the owner he made a big mistake.

An owner that has spent thousands of dollars on a new system is probably not going to tell anyone that phones him that he feels he was conned and is not happy with his investment.

No supplier is going to put bad referrals on their web site either.

A good way to check out referrals is to go to the site unannounced, order something that requires a few changes and specific cooking instructions and see if you get good efficient service and exactly what you ordered. If not, you do of course need to determine if it's because of the system or incompetent staff. Talk to the floor staff that use the system and not just the management, they will tell you if the system functions well or not. If it's a pc system ask if it ever locks up or crashes, find out how it handles busy periods. If it does crash; why? What happens to sales in progress when it crashes? Do they always reconcile turnover at the end of the day?

Talk to colleagues and other restaurateurs to find out their experiences.

Our local pub bistro has a system that freezes during busy periods. For some reason the senior management say it works fine but the floor staff say it locks up all the time. The supplier's promotional material and web site rave about the reliability of the system. Some restaurateurs decide to opt out of making a decision themselves and call in a consultant. Choosing a consultant is a bit like choosing a financial planner, how do you know that what you will eventually get recommended is not from a company that has an arrangement with the consultant. If you do decide to use a consultant, you should also be asking for referrals or checking their web site for users. If the referral sites are all using the same system, chances are this is the one you will get recommended regardless of your requirements. Yet you will then probably still get charged a substantial consultancy fee.