

## Stay in Touch

Over the past few years we have seen a growth in the number of touch screen terminals used in restaurants. Everywhere you go users are tapping on a screen instead of using a conventional keyboard.

Is touch screen technology one of the trends in technology that comes and goes or a practical alternative to conventional keyboards and worth paying the extra price for?

The main advantage of a touch screen terminal over conventional POS is that the operator doesn't have to look away from the screen when registering items. The menu screen and sales journal are within the same area of view, whereas with conventional POS the operator has to look away from the screen to the keyboard to search for an item then back at the screen to check if they have registered the correct item. When registering large orders this can save a lot of time and makes touch screen POS faster and more accurate to use.

The progress of computers into point of sale applications brought with it a variety of keyboard options with the standard computer keyboard not really being suitable for hospitality. Retail outlets where most items were sold by bar code could use a conventional keyboard, but for bars and restaurants a pc keyboard was just not practical, so suppliers came up with a variety of cash register style keyboards that could be used with computer POS terminals.

For navigating through a restaurant menu with an option such as a steak, cooked rare, with pepper sauce, with salad, with chips chosen from option menus, keyboards are limited in key size and rely on operators selecting menu options from the keyboard while referring back to the display for information about the options to be chosen. The advantage of well designed software and touch screen technology in this example is the ability to lay out the screen with large buttons and follow through screens that present options with clear choices to make navigating through menu options easy.

Most of the touch screens used in hospitality have what is known as "resistive touch" which responds to touch from pens, knives and forks and credit cards as well as the finger. The touch screen has a fine metallic layer and is a separate screen that is placed on top of the monitor which in turn reduces the brightness of the original monitor. Quality of touch screens varies from manufacture to manufacturer and as usual you get what you pay for. Monitors vary in brightness and the resistive touch screen panels typically are made in what is known as 5 or 7 wire the later being more expensive and more responsive to touch.

If you are looking for a new touch screen POS system and have a lot of natural light in the restaurant or an outside cashier station make sure that you look at the display in daylight conditions as it may look good in a showroom but be hard to see in daylight. A good quality display will also be clear when viewing from an angle not just front on. Check that the touch screen is very responsive when you tap it and that there is no delay between touching the screen and the items registering. A good benchmark system is the new ROM based Uniwell DX915 which has a huge super bright display and fast response touch screen and flow through software that sets a very high standard in touch screen technology.

Once you have made your touch screen purchase avoid using metallic pens and knives and forks to tap the screen as they will damage the protective top layer of the screen. It's not a good idea to place them under glass racks either as a falling glass will indent the screen, damage the protective layer and render the touch surface useless and result in a costly repair.