

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A DURABLE, RELIABLE POS SYSTEM

If point-of-sale terminals were human, they'd probably hate life in a restaurant industry.

Buffeted by their use in hot, greasy kitchens, accidental spills in bars and harried, heavy-fingered servers banging in rushed orders, these high-tech order processors must withstand far more abuse than computerized order processors in other industries. Consequently, their hardware can break down under such stress, requiring expensive repairs and costly downtime that reduces a busy staff's productivity and a restaurant's sales.

With notoriously tight profit margins and ever-escalating costs, restaurant operators insist on equipment that gives them a good return on their tech investment. That means they need POS terminals that are durable, reliable, always ready for business and constructed to their specifications.

"That really shouldn't be such a tall order when those attributes are essential to running their businesses," says Ron Chan, director of marketing for Posiflex, a Hayward, Calif., maker of POS terminal and peripheral devices. "Downtime for a POS terminal in a restaurant setting is dead time. They must be made to withstand the added stress of a restaurant environment."

And then some, Chan says. Building terminals to withstand human mistakes and abuse may ensure the



device operates under normal use. But as he stresses — and operators know — restaurants aren't normal environments for digital devices. Therefore Posiflex puts its terminals through rigorous testing that exceeds the punishment of common use. Constructed to withstand the abnormal accident, such terminals remain ready to go under the harshest circumstances.

"It's one thing to expose them to flour dust from pizza or airborne grease in a fried chicken restaurant, but it's just as hard on electronics exposed to outdoor weather on a patio, for example," he says. In order to test the limits of its electronics, Posiflex goes further by putting its terminals in heat chambers until their plastic components begin to melt. "We also drop heavy metal balls on our products to test their ability to withstand shock.

"Granted, these are harsher than real-world examples, not common

occurrences. So if they can take this extreme abuse, being hit constantly by the fingers of counter workers at a quick service restaurant won't hurt them," he says.

Tried and true

But there's nothing like the real world to test such equipment in unexpected extremes. In 2013, a deadly EF-5 tornado ripped through Oklahoma with winds peaking at 210 mph. In its path was a convenience store that used a Posiflex terminal, which, when the damage was surveyed, was buried under the rubble. Yet when the terminal was cleaned off and plugged in, it turned on and was ready to use.

A year earlier a pair of Posiflex terminals were forced to endure the passage of Hurricane Sandy as it battered the country's northeast coast. The massive storm surge pushed water over a beach, across a

street and onto an outside bar patio, where the terminals lay exposed to the elements. Worse, sand from the beach and flying debris littered the patio and required days to clean up.

Yet near the time the restaurant was ready to reopen for business, the operator merely wiped the terminals clean and plugged them in. Both booted up immediately and remain in operation years later.

“For restaurant POS systems, it’s all about maximum uptime,” Chan says. “If they’re not running, the restaurant’s not running — or at least not running well.”

A smart investment

Beyond durability, POS systems must advance with the times in ways that benefit a restaurant’s bottom line. One of the greatest drains on profits is theft, which can happen easily to a POS system that’s not designed to catch clever employees. Since the advent of the time clock, employees have learned to punch in staffers who haven’t shown up on time or punch out late those who left early.

“Buddy punching may seem harmless to most employees, but it can be costly, especially across a chain,” says the director of IT for a large casual restaurant chain. Stopping it, he says, only creates an extra hassle for staff managers. “Trying to catch or prevent employees from clocking in friends adds to a manager’s list of concerns.”



Posiflex Product Line

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2. HS Series compact terminal with printer
3. TX Series commercial grade mini-PC
4. XT Series retail ready touch screen terminals

The chain approached Posiflex about the use of a fingerprint ID reader at its terminals to reduce buddy punching and improve loss prevention at multiple levels, Chan says.

“Now when this restaurant chain conducts loss prevention investigations, they no longer have to review time consuming video to determine who performed which particular transaction,” he says. “If a fingerprint is used to authorize a transaction, you know which person was present.”

The same chain also is using Posiflex tablets to allow customers to place orders themselves. According to the chain’s IT director, with the

tablet, customers can order a round of drinks and appetizers as soon as they are seated. They can then prompt a server for refills and even provide games for children to play. And near the meal’s end, the tablet can be programmed to display a selection of tempting desserts. Diners also can use the tablet to pay their bill and leave.

“Part of what we do is to help our restaurant customers streamline and simplify their operations,” Chan says. “Putting that highly reliable and easy-to-use technology into the hands of the guest makes that happen.” ■

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