

Don't Let Recession Fever Kill Technology

10 P.M., SATURDAY:

The bartender taps the touch screen on the POS workstation behind the bar to ring in a sale. Nothing happens. His manager tries a different terminal. Nothing. Downstairs the POS server screen is blank. Fingers crossed, the manager restarts the server. Still nothing. Panicked, he tries to get an evening callback from the POS vendor; he fails, probably because, in anticipation of the recession, the restaurant owner has canceled the service contract.

10 A.M., SUNDAY:

The manager receives a callback but is refused service pending up-front payment and authorization from vendor management. The POS is down for another day. Food orders have to be handwritten and walked back to the kitchen. Credit-card processing is suspended. Checks are calculated on a \$10 adding machine. Inaccuracy runs rampant.

8 A.M., MONDAY:

The restaurant owner is at the POS dealer's office to get his own credit card processed and sign a work order. A tech dials in, replaces the errant translog file (a two-minute process), and the system is back in operation. The restaurant owner saved the cost of the service contract, but what did he lose?

System and Repair Meltdown

At another restaurant the reservation system goes offline, and the managers try to maintain their budget by fixing it themselves. Six days later, an hour before dinner service, with the entire system in a corner of the dining room, they call for on-site support.

Why was a hostess or manager allowed to try to fix a vital system? If the gas went off on the ten-burner stove, would the executive chef have allowed a line cook to attempt the repair?

It took the tech almost two hours to reverse-engineer the attempted fix, one hour to reprogram the components and fix what was actually wrong, and an additional hour to correct damage to the peripheral systems. Beyond the actual service-call fee (at evening rates), what was the cost in lost reservations?

Respect Tech

Technology, once considered a luxury to make things easier, has become a vital part of running the restaurant and bar. The systems are complex, are task specific, and cannot be taken for granted. Every dollar must be collected and accounted for. The POS, reservation, and other systems must be maintained, even upgraded if necessary.

As recession fever rages in the business-decision process, it's imperative to keep a sense of what has to be done now and what can be put off. There are some actions

that are definitely in the maintenance or troubleshooting category: restarting the server every 30 days to clear the cache, reseating *all* cables before automatically reaching for the phone, making sure the equipment is actually plugged in, resetting a tripped circuit breaker.

Owners and managers must be diligent and make sure employees respect system limits. Recession or not, tapping a touch screen with a pointed object will still break the touch screen. Plugging a space heater into an orange isolated/dedicated power outlet will shut down your POS and maybe fry a few workstations along the way.

Adding a simple handset to a complex phone system takes more than supplying a Blackberry-proficient manager with the admin name and password. Poking around at the root level—clicking reboot instead of reset—can wipe out the settings *and* the system licenses. Managers should weigh the risk of no phones—no communication with the outside world—against an hour's fee for a trained professional. They should not assume there is an “undo” button; there usually isn't.

Technology is a spider whose legs are permanently embedded in the restaurant infrastructure. Customers expect and employees are reliant on systems working at 100 percent. Use technology to its full potential, and it will contribute to the bottom line. Cut back too far, and the systems will fail. In this economy such failures, perhaps tolerable in time of profit, are simply not affordable.



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