

Paging Power

The simplicity and reliability of paging systems is helping to drive their use far beyond the restaurant waiting line.



By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer,
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Although paging technology has long been a fixture of the casual dining segment, the modern-day restaurant pager is being incorporated in other segments of the foodservice industry as well.

Joining casual dining are the fast casual and quick serve restaurant segment, which are increasingly seeing the value in restaurant paging systems for their simplicity in form, reliability in function and affordability in cost. And as the variety of use cases continues to expand, paging systems are finding a home in other industries as well.

What's the use?

Restaurant operators continue to have a need to alert guests – whether it's to let them know their table is ready, their food is prepared and ready for pick-up at the counter or their carryout order is packaged and ready to go.

A casual dining operation can easily alleviate the noise and confusion of a busy waiting line by handing guests a pager that's quiet and discreet, allowing them to get a drink in a bar or sit on the outside patio without worrying about hearing their name called for a table.

And when matched with restaurant management software, paging systems with an open API can be easily integrated with wait list software as well as point-of-sale and kitchen display systems, allowing the operator to not only manage guest flow but access a host of data as well, enabling them to see such information as average and peak wait times and to track how long it takes for a guest to receive their food once they are seated.



A fast casual operator can avoid crowding in the order area by giving guests a pager to notify them when their food is ready. Same for a quick-serve restaurant, alerting customers that their order is bagged or trayed and ready for the taking.

“Having a paging system gives the guest the opportunity to relax, enjoy time with family and not have to worry about when their food will be ready,” said David Futrell, who owns nine Fuddruckers locations in Texas and uses a guest paging solution from Addison, Texas-based Long Range Systems. “Also, with the loud music we play in our restaurants, customers don’t have to worry about missing their name being called and can just rely on the pagers to alert them.

Ara Iskenderian, co-owner of the Mediterranean fast casual concept Zankou Chicken in southern California, estimates the average service time in his restaurants has fallen from five minutes to three-and-a-half minutes by eliminating a numbers system and implementing guest pagers to alert customers when their orders were ready. He now has guest pagers in all eight of his Zankou Chicken locations in California.

“It has helped me by making the service better, making it much more fun to order your food, and by making my restaurant a better place to eat,” Iskenderian said.

Standing the test of time

Paging systems have seen their use expand in large part because of their reliability and simplicity. Most systems are ready to go out of the box, with no setup or networking required. Little to no training is required, an advantage in the high-turnover world of the restaurant industry where staff need tools that are quick to learn and easy to use.

Unlike many other technological applications, there are no ongoing software fees or infrastructure requirements with paging systems. Paging tools may be easily integrated with other solutions, with data that can be derived from those integrations serving as an additional measurement tool to help an operator improve their business.

From the guests’ perspective, pagers are completely intuitive. Guests already know what to do when their pager is activated and need no explanation at the host stand or counter.

In addition, the systems are inexpensive and reliable, functioning perfectly in nearly every environment. Paging systems originally came into widespread use in the medical industry thanks to their ability to pick up a signal in the depths of a hospital or other large facility.

The technology doesn't suffer from network delays as can happen with cellular-based systems. The devices are simple to maintain as well, with rechargeable batteries that keep the devices continually ready for use.

And today's guest pager are sleeker and more aesthetically pleasing than predecessors with features such as multi-colored LEDs, choices in how the pager glows or vibrates and what sort of branding appears on the case.

The expanding use case

While paging technology has certainly found a welcome home in the restaurant industry, it has applications in a nearly unlimited number of verticals.

Imagine a car dealership's customers dropping their car off at the service department and being handed a pager. Instead of being tied to the waiting room or having their name called over the store's PA system, those customers are free to roam the store or sit outside if they please.



Rather than having to spend time searching for customers, staff can use their time more efficiently, serving other customers or speeding up the completion of service work.

And along with notifying guests, paging systems can be a simple and inexpensive way to communicate with staff in a large facility, such as a warehouse or construction site.

Rather than depending on an expensive radio system or rely on the employees' own mobile phones, having those employees pick up a pager at the beginning of their shift can make it easy to summon them to the front office if needed.

Pets R People 2, a 24-hour cageless pet daycare and boarding facility in Knoxville, Tenn., is spread out over a 5,000 square foot indoor facility and an additional 5,000 square foot outdoor area and handles up to 80 dogs on any given day. Owner Jesse Clark implemented a silent paging system as a way to replace the loud bell he had been using to alert staff that someone had entered the facility.

"We used to have a doorbell, but it didn't work out well," Clark said. "It would get the dogs overexcited and it causes behavioral problems. I've tried other systems but [the signals] don't penetrate throughout the building."

Clark installed door sensors from LRS and equipped every four-man crew with holstered pagers. As a result, staff aren't tethered to the front desk and can more fully focus on other tasks and the dogs don't get excited by a loud bell.

"It became a silent doorbell for us, so when people come in, it notifies all employees that someone is here. It keeps all of our packs calm," Clark said. "It's a lifesaver for us."

The simplicity of paging endures

There's an old saying in the business world: If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.

The incorporation of paging technology into the restaurant industry continues to grow. And as time goes on, savvy operators continue to find new applications for paging technology and develop ways to use that technology to better measure and manage their businesses.

Wherever there is a need to notify guests – whether it's a restaurant setting or other service-oriented business – the simplicity and reliability of paging continues to provide businesses the functional solution they need.

About the sponsor:

Long Range Systems (LRS) is a leading global provider of on-site paging, guest management, business intelligence and market research tools. The company's hardware and software solutions are used in a variety of settings, including the hospitality, medical, retail and automotive industries. Specifically for fast casual restaurateurs, LRS developed Table Tracker: the fast casual food-delivery system that streamlines operations and improves customer satisfaction. Table Tracker helps food runners deliver food faster, instead of wandering around the restaurant looking for guests. It's proven to turn tables faster, improve guest satisfaction and streamline operations through knowledge and insights provided with order-tracking data.