



Technology Takes Restaurant Management to the Next Level

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By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer, Fast Casual

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Technology has been an integral part of the restaurant industry since there was, well, technology.

Restaurant companies, for instance, were one of the earliest adopters of computers. Although 50 years ago one may have gotten by with hand-written tickets and a cash box, today an operator wouldn't even consider opening a new restaurant without a digital point-of-sale system (POS). And while early systems mainly just tracked sales, today those systems allow operators to create schedules, manage inventory and calculate costs, in many cases via an accessible-from-anywhere Web dashboard.

More recently, operators have been leveraging the burgeoning Internet of Things (IoT) to outfit doors, freezers, steam tables and HVAC systems with connected sensors that alert managers to problems via notifications to their smartphones.

And just as the capabilities of POS systems have expanded over the years, the application of IoT concepts has grown from tracking issues such as temperatures and mechanical issues to allowing operators to track the location of both guests and staff.

Leveraging the mobile experience

According to the [Pew Research Center](#), 91 percent of Americans ages 18-49 own a smartphone, up from 35 percent in 2011.

At the same time, restaurant digital orders have grown at an average annual rate of 23 percent since 2013 and are projected to triple in volume by the end of 2020, [according to](#) research firm The NPD Group. Mobile makes up the lion's share of that business, with 6 out of 10 digital orders place by mobile apps.

Today, those trends are combining to make it easier for operators to manage their restaurants.



Texas-based technology company Long Range Systems, for example, is leveraging its experience in queue management and other applications as well as IoT sensor technology to create a single “smart platform” for keeping on top of restaurant operations from the back door to the front door and beyond.

Long Range Systems, founded in 1995, is the company behind such technologies as the restaurant pager and the Table Tracker table location system.

In the back of the house, the company’s VEN-U platform leverages IoT sensors to monitor issues such as freezer and steam table temperatures and whether or not the back door is open. In the front of the house, VEN-U uses a unique Bluetooth network, which tracks beacons as they move throughout the restaurant.

VEN-U connectors, in the shape of a table tent or any brandable object along with customer’s phones, allow operators to locate customers indoors or outdoors. Customer’s phones can be located via the addition of a few lines of code embedded in the business’s existing mobile app. VEN-U gives operators the ability to know when customers have arrived, where they’re located within the venue, and where they are in the service process.

In one use case, a customer can walk into a restaurant, sit down at a table, order their meal via a mobile app, and have it delivered to their table, all without having to engage with anyone at all.

“Basically, for the customer having a phone is like having a kiosk in their pocket,” said Mara Ghisani-Rich, product manager with LRS.

“They then have the benefits of a self-order kiosk, such as ordering-ahead before they arrive to dine in or for take-out,” Ghisani-Rich said. “It allows for many more options for engaging

with the customer from curbside delivery, loyalty points, special discounts, to various payment options.”

For restaurants that do a significant carryout business, the VEN-U platform can alert staff when a customer has pulled into the parking lot, allowing them to deliver that order without the guest ever having to get out of their car.

The capabilities of the VEN-U platform also mirror many of the same features incorporated into LRS’ guest paging system. If a guest visits a restaurant and there’s a 45-minute wait, they simply give their mobile number to the host or hosts to be notified when a table is ready. In the same way VEN-U allows operators to track guests, they can track staff as well. If a staff member is nowhere to be found or their area of responsibility appears to be neglected, operators can check via their own mobile device to locate that person. Maybe they accidentally locked themselves in the stockroom, or maybe they stepped out the back door for a break. Either way, the operator doesn’t have to waste time during a busy meal period tracking them down.



VEN-U Sensors expand management capabilities

Long Range Systems partnered with Swift Sensors to launch VEN-U Sensors, a system of wireless devices that help restaurant managers stay on top of environmental data in their locations. Swift Sensors has developed a low-cost, unified solution to proactively protect and monitor equipment, locations and processes 24/7.

Each matchbox-sized sensor is powered by a replaceable coin cell battery. The sensors wirelessly transmit data via UHF or Bluetooth Low Energy to a cloud-enabled Bridge, which in turn securely passes data to the cloud using WiFi, Ethernet and/or cellular connectivity. Each Bridge has on-board memory to store up to two weeks of sensor data while not connected to the cloud.

Data from the various sensors is viewable on a computer or smartphone via a Web-based dashboard. Multiple thresholds can be set separately for each sensor, with alerts delivered via SMS text, email and/or phone call if measurements exceed the chosen threshold.

Whether a temperature increases or decreases, a piece of equipment stops (or starts) vibrating, water is present where it shouldn’t be and more, VEN-U Sensors instantly alert managers to inconsistencies. By capturing that data automatically, they eliminate time-consuming daily tasks that require hand-entering important measurements like freezer and refrigerator temperatures or other status metrics.

In addition, managers can receive regularly scheduled updates and pull summary reports to validate that standards are within compliance requirements or to provide critical data during health department visits, protecting the brand from issues that may result from unknown equipment issues or failures.

Source: Long Range Systems

And in much the same way LRS' original queue and location management systems generated data, the VEN-U platform provides operators with in-depth analytics and reporting that provides management a comprehensive view into wait times, service delivery times, and customer volume inside, outside, and near your venue.

The possibilities for improving operations with VEN-U are nearly endless. Today, a restaurant operator wouldn't consider opening a new location without a POS system. Not long from now, an operator may not consider opening that location without a VEN-U platform. The capabilities of the VEN-U platform also mirror many of the same features incorporated into LRS' guest paging system. If a guest visits a restaurant and there's a 45-minute wait, they simply give their mobile number to the host or hosts to be notified when a table is ready. Guests not only receive a notification on their phones, but can monitor their place in line as well.

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About the sponsor:

VEN-U by LRS enables any business to engage, manage, and monitor guests, staff, and sites. Combined with in-depth data reporting, VEN-U provides real-time insights and analysis for businesses to enhance guest engagement and maximize operational efficiency.

The VEN-U platform offers engagement, operations management, and remote monitoring of sites. Our solution locates and gathers guest, staff, and sensor data to optimize operations for smarter venue management or what we call an Operations Management System (OMS).

The LRS team is committed to building VEN-U technologies that empower businesses to manage their operations while improving the entire guest experience. VEN-U provides solutions via wireless communication systems, remote sensors, Bluetooth, beacons, and mobile applications. Our patented technologies are in over 80,000 business and 50 countries around the world.

From paging systems to comprehensive venue management, find out how we can help your business thrive because Smart Venues Start [Here](#)™. Contact us at 800-577-8101 or email at info@lrsus.com