



The owners of Belluci's in Canberra have found there's no "one size fits all" when it comes to POS systems.

Point of no return

The secret to streamlined food and beverage ordering and sales can all be in the palm of your hand, writes **Miles Clarke**.

Communication is the heartbeat of any restaurant. It keeps the tempo of a three-piece band in a cosy bistro, or a full-blooded orchestra in a large restaurant serving hundreds of covers a day.

Back in my restaurant management days, it was only the waiter's order that was written down—with everyone else relying on their memories to keep food and beverage service flowing. It took but the barest instructions to keep business ticking over.

Times have certainly changed since then, and with labour costs a constant headache for restaurateurs, there's a steady migration to point-of-sale (POS) terminals and hand-held devices to streamline meal service and boost productivity.

Equipment failure is one of the eternal nightmares for a

restaurateur, and there are no half-measures when it comes to POS equipment. If a terminal or hand-held device fails to push an order through to the correct department—usually the bar or kitchen—the results can be disastrous, as every minute counts in food service. Irrespective of how good a meal might be, if it doesn't arrive on time there's very little catch-up that can be done.

In Canberra, Bela Kover runs five restaurants—three traditional Italian Belluci Trattorias in Dickson, Woden and Manuka; Verve Café & Bar in Manuka; and Cream Café in Civic. It's the biggest restaurant group in the capital—and, in a city where restaurant business is highly seasonal, a tight rein has to be maintained on labour costs and inventory.

Kover has invested heavily in point-of-sale equipment and currently uses the TriniTEQ

(formerly known as PalmTEQ) WaiterPAD hand-held devices. He's happy with his system, but warns anyone considering buying a computerised POS system to do their homework.

"We initially had POS terminals and immediately ran into a problem where our wait staff would be lining up to input their orders into the terminal, which defeated the purpose. What was a much bigger problem was the situation where the orders would be delayed in delivery from POS terminal to the kitchen or bar. This led to confusion for everyone. There is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to POS systems."

That said, Kover is very happy with his current system, as it frees up his wait staff from delivering their orders and speeds up meal production.

"A well-trained staff member will be capable of serving

upwards of 20 tables, though I think the average would be more like 10. It also allows us to have staff dedicated simply to the delivery of dishes."

Good training is essential and Kover is well aware that staff can become so preoccupied with filling out their orders electronically that they lose the important interface with customers.

"We have a procedure whereby a waiter using the hand-held for the first time will manually write down the order on paper, step back from the table and then transfer the order to the WaiterPAD. People pick up how to use the electronic order system very quickly, especially the 17-20 year-olds who fly across the electronic pages in no time."

An important role of the POS system is the inventory control it offers, with all sales information being reported

every day or on a weekly basis—giving management a complete picture of the business activity and any anomalies that might arise. The Belluci restaurants will soon be able to electronically feed all their sales information to a central office for analysis by Kover and his team.

Siobhan Mulvahil, marketing communications manager for TriniTEQ, says Australian restaurateurs are warming to the concept of POS systems in increasing numbers.

“As TriniTEQ not only operates in Australia but also the UK and the US, we know that the adoption of new POS products in Australia has been very good. The Australian hospitality market is open to new ideas and understands that to be competitive within the industry, adopting new technology is imperative.



Smooth sales systems are what keeps a busy restaurant cooking.

“Most business owners we deal with know that without a POS system that’s reliable, effective and easy to use, they will lose revenue,” she says.

“We have found the acceptance of our WaiterPAD hand-held ordering device to be quite high. The majority of our sales include WaiterPAD and the response we receive

from our customers is that they are financially better off. But it also helps in reducing the workload of their employees.”

There are several innovations in store for WaiterPAD this year, including remote credit card capabilities, TAB card facilities and multi-language options.

On the question of reliability, Mulvahil says the technology

now enables WaiterPAD to use radio frequency.

“This means fewer drop-outs, longer battery life and tighter security. It also allows WaiterPAD to cover greater distances and transmit through solid objects. Weighing less than 300 grams, WaiterPAD has been created to withstand just about any hospitality environment,” she says.

At the Belluci restaurants in Canberra, the waiters are assigned their own WaiterPAD device for each meal service and are responsible for that device for the entire shift.

Sydney’s DH Technology provides the hardware in the restaurants, which runs the RedCat system of POS equipment, including hand-held devices and terminals.

Spokeswoman Angela Mitchell says there’s been a 15 per cent growth in POS sales.