

Benefits of Conversational Ordering in a POS System

Flexible ordering based on how customers speak enables operators to improve customer satisfaction and ticket sales.

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One of the first things to fall by the wayside in the operation of a quick-service restaurant is the word “quick.”

Anything from the addition of a brand-new register operator to a change on the menu can create a logjam in the restaurant as staff struggle to adapt. The result often is longer lines, slower serving times, unhappy customers and decreased revenue.

In a business where seconds can literally mean the difference between making a profit and closing the doors, any improvement that can make the operation more efficient is of infinite value to an operator.

For point-of-sale systems, that improvement has come in the form of conversational ordering.

Defining the process

Simply put, conversational ordering is the ability to take an order in the manner in which a customer might speak.

“It allows the operator to not interrupt the customer and to maintain eye contact



Conversational ordering allows the operator to maintain eye contact with the customer during the interaction, providing friendlier, more personal service.

when they are taking their order,” said John Perrill Jr., chief technology officer for WAND Corporation, a supplier of POS systems and digital menu boards for the quick-service restaurant industry.

WAND's NextGen POS system features conversational ordering. The company's clients include many of the top QSR brands in the market.

Although it may seem obvious when looking back, conversational ordering is a relatively new concept in POS systems.

When POS systems came into widespread use in the 1970s, their main function was to calculate the correct total for a guest check. Orders were scribbled on a paper ticket, and in most cases called back to the kitchen via a microphone at the counter.

As POS systems developed, though, they were linked to printers or video display terminals in the kitchen. Restaurant staff could begin preparing orders literally seconds after they were placed by the guest. Over time, the POS system became the heart of the modern quick-service restaurant.

But those early POS systems often were designed by computer programmers who had little experience working behind the counter of a fast-food operation. What resulted was a counterintuitive process that bore little resemblance to the way customers actually placed their orders.

Typically, the system consisted of buttons, or a keypad, with screen overlays that could be changed. Technology was very limited.

Training a new POS operator was a lengthy process that required memorizing a complicated keypad and learning an assortment of tricks to match the operation of the POS with the way customers actually ordered.

"A lot of the ordering at a QSR restaurant

is done in the form of combos," Perrill said. "The problem with the older systems was that you had to complete the whole combo before the next combo was entered. If a customer continued with their order without completing the combo, the POS operator often didn't want to appear rude by interrupting them and they would have to go back and ask, 'What did you want with that first combo?'"

The result was a system fraught with inaccuracies and inefficiencies as the register-operator struggled to match the choices a customer made with the POS order flow. Operators shied away from offering profitable add-ons that might have required voiding an entire order and starting the process over from scratch.

The benefits

With the advent of the drive-thru, QSR operators began looking for ways to shave seconds off the production process. A typical QSR does about 70 percent of its business via the drive-thru, and wait times of longer than three minutes can spell disaster for an operator.



Drive-thru customers make up about 70 percent of a typical QSR's business. Wait times of longer than three minutes can result in unhappy customers and decreased revenue.

Technological developments in the form of increased computing power and touch-screen displays have allowed POS manufacturers to reshape the ordering process to maximize restaurant production.

Using the combo example, conversational ordering allows the POS operator to enter part of the order for one combo and go on to the next, returning to the first combo when the customer has made his or her decision.

“One of the big benefits of conversational ordering is that you no longer have to interrupt the customer,” Perrill said. “You can go back and fulfill an incomplete order and make changes on the fly without requiring a void.”

Conversational ordering offers a more user-friendly experience. The button size is larger, so it is easier for the register operator to read. And because register operators are now able to maintain eye contact with the customer while ringing in the order, the entire exchange is more natural and enjoyable.

From the point of view of the guest, results include increased speed of service; smooth, accurate order flow and increased satisfaction. From the point of view of the restaurant operator, results include improved order accuracy, shorter employee training time, fewer voids and higher ticket averages due to ease of upselling.

Conversational ordering allows register operators to enter orders faster and more

Benefits of conversational ordering

- Increased speed of service
- More accurate order flow
- Increased customer satisfaction
- Shorter employee training time
- Fewer voids
- Increased average ticket amount

naturally, improving the time it takes for customers to receive their order, without sacrificing accuracy.

About the sponsor: WAND Corporation is a leader in QSR technology, providing NextGen POS and digital menu solutions. With nearly 25 years in the QSR space and 13 years in digital engagement, WAND is the first company to have developed and sold a Conversational Ordering, NextGen POS system and a completely dynamic three-panel outdoor digital menu solution. WAND provides full management services for QSR operators with 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week technical support 365 days of the year. WAND works with powerful international partners, including NCR, Panasonic, IBM, Samsung, LG Electronics and more.