

Bank goes cashless

Wachovia implements touch-screen kiosk for meal ordering and cashless payment.

Just 10 miles from downtown Orlando, FL, 516 Wachovia employees, plus those attending classes at the training center, can choose to eat at – or take-out from – almost a dozen fast-food or quick-serve restaurants within a three mile radius of their offices. Intent on keeping them on-site and well-served within their 30-min. meal period, Kathy Sanders, Wachovia's v.p. of corporate financial svcs. based in Charlotte, NC, researched various options prior to the opening of this site three years ago. She chose to install, in its brand-new dining facility, a high-tech touch-screen ordering and cashless payment system as part of the solution to keep captures rates high.

Since office space is spreadout over 239,000 sq. ft. all on one floor, Wachovia's Legacy Place cafeteria is quite a hike from many of the offices. Plus, as Sanders recalls, there wasn't a whole lot of money, a lot of room or nearly enough customers for a full-fledged café (albeit too many for just vending alone to serve the need).

So she opted to install a modular system, which fits neatly into about 225 sq. ft. of actual kitchen space. Within its small footprint, it provides deli items, pizza, a carved entrée, vegetables and grill items daily. In addition, a portable salad bar is in close proximity.

All in one: The modular unit provides the features of both a kitchen and servery – back-of-the-house and front-of-the-house all in one. Each of the three employees or the manager can fill an order and handle production for the salad bar. Since there's little customer interaction with anyone of staff, operators need to find alternative ways to build a relationship with customers and create a personal touch, Sanders points out.

"On their morning break, customers can go to a cashless payment kiosk – there are three remote terminals within the building – and order their meals for pick-up at a certain time", she explains.

"We find that about 40% of customers are doing that regularly. There's also a primary kiosk order system in the cafeteria, and, as at the other terminals, you order everything on that screen and the numbered order, with time stamp, prints out in the kitchen. There's a choice of three methods of payment: bank debit card, credit card or a proprietary card, again right at the kiosk terminal.

Tower access: To keep costs down and expedite ordering, Sanders installed a point-of-sale system that features a debit-card reader. There's also a cash-to-card station where customers add value to their debit account.



Wachovia employees in Orlando, FL, not utilize a cashless payment system. They add value to cards (above) and the pick up their orders from various service points (below).



Overall, approx. 60% of customers come to the cafeteria to place their orders with breakfast participation not at 44% and lunch 51%. Cafeteria seating is available for 75, but two break rooms as well as the vending area afford additional tables and chairs.

Eurest Dining Svcs., the contractor handling three other Wachovia dining facilities throughout the country, also oversees this operation, Sanders points out.

"We contract-out since we're in the banking business and this is not a core competency for us. This system doesn't market Eurest signature items with the bells and whistles of their other locations. But to assist them in keeping costs down, we felt we'd go with cashless payment kiosks, saving approx. \$25,000 a year for a cashier's salary."

From the technology standpoint, there's a huge opportunity in cashless tender: from the convenience standpoint, customers order at their leisure; and from the contractor's perspective there's higher check averages, although with employee salaries here ranging from \$28,000 to \$45,000, the amount of disposable income is not that high, she admits.

A \$750,000 savings: While still in the initial planning stages of the Orlando facility, Sanders was looking at an estimate of \$1 million for a kitchen, servery and dining area. With the purchase and installation of both the modular system and cashless kiosk system (but not including electrical and water hook-ups), costs were kept to approx. \$250,000. "I'm told you can unplug and move the system – that was part of the manufacturer's agreement with us – so there's a portability option that was also attractive to us," she says.

Under the category of "lessons learned", or "what I'd do differently next time," Sanders would build in to the contract a provision for updating software. "But I've been told there's no upgrade for this generation of software because it's now obsolete – in technology anything over 18 months is 'old'. I do believe that an online Web-based tool is the way to go as long as you keep the license renewed to use that system; you get the upgrade if you paid for the software. I know if I was the technology company involved in point-of-sale apparatus, I'd be working on a Web-based or kiosk-based ordering system and a cashless payment combination."

Sanders recently detailed her experience with touch-screen ordering and cashless payment to a gathering of more than 260 operators and manufacturers attending the Society for Foodservice Management (SFM) Critical Issues Conference in New York.

Sanders admits his technology has been in the marketplace for several years. However, it was evident by the attention paid and questions asked that the audience felt its time – perhaps for their operation was "now".

by Karen Weisberg