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## Payment Decadence: Pay-at-Table Tech Takes Hold

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People are on the go more today than ever before. Laptops, blackberrys, iPods and more offer convenience and satisfy needs quickly, even when on the move. The same is true in the restaurant industry. Point-of-sale (POS) peripherals, such as printers and payment systems, have lost their wires and can travel from table to table for faster service and increased table turns, pleasing both customers and employees.

Although more common in other parts of the world, paying tableside is growing in popularity throughout the United States, and one of the biggest benefits is increased security and customer confidence since credit cards no longer disappear for processing - an important benefit in today's world of identity theft.

"There is a lot of talk about credit card theft and people do not want their credit cards to leave their sight," says Mary Russo, president and COO of Food, Friends and Company, a restaurant management company that operates 13 restaurants in nine states. Among the company's brands is Cozymel's Mexican Grill in Grapevine, Texas.



### Tech advancements

As a result, technology vendors continue to step up to the needs of operators with new hardware and software, upgraded options and increased security. For example, Citizen Systems America ([www.citizen-systems.com](http://www.citizen-systems.com)) introduced the CMP-10 high-security Bluetooth mobile printer, a small lightweight receipt printer, weighing less than 12 ounces with 128-bit encryption for increased security.

For its part, Epson ([www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)) recently upgraded the security on its Mobilink handheld wireless printer to comply with Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA) protocol created by the Wi-Fi Alliance. The receipt and label printers use 802.11b and provide 10 hours of battery life, or 20 hours using Bluetooth, the company reports.

"With the Mobilink, my servers carry it along with a mobile POS, and they don't have to leave the table to get the check or receipt, and customers don't have to wait," explains Norman Wright, president of The BreakRoom, a bar and restaurant in Grand Rapids, Mich. "I believe mobile products will be the standard soon. My servers have the POS in their apron and the printer hooked on their belt."

VeriFone ([www.verifone.com](http://www.verifone.com)) also increased the security on its wireless handheld V670 Bluetooth payment solution, adding Verashield protect, which encrypts data inside the hardware the same way a PIN number is encrypted into an ATM machine, according to the company. It removes any usable data from the restaurant operator's system so that even if there was a security breach, the data would be unusable.

"The system has an ID and I can batch all the information from the computer in my office versus the phone line credit card machine where I have to batch through the device," says Deanna Christopher, food and beverage manager at The Adobe Restaurant at the Biltmore Golf Course and Spa in Phoenix, Ariz. Her establishment has been using the V670 unit for almost a year. "With the V670, even if the entire hardware device was stolen, the information would be useless."

The device processes the payment and prints the receipt out for the customer, who is in charge of the entire process. "The waiter puts in their server number and hands the device to the customer who swipes their own card," Christopher explains. "They can split the check on it, and the machine prompts them for a tip, and they can choose from 15, 18 or 20 percent, which is calculated for them. It prints the receipt out for them, and with everything going on lately regarding identity theft, the credit card never leaves their hand."

### Customers in control

One of the newest options available in the marketplace not only puts paying into the customers hands, but allows them to choose when they would like to pay. Vendors such as SoftTouch LLC ([www.softtouchpos.com](http://www.softtouchpos.com)) and Tabletop Media ([www.tabletopmedia.com](http://www.tabletopmedia.com)) offer systems that allow customers to pay at any time during their meal.

Introduced in March 2008, SoftPay is a patent-pending kiosk-style touch screen unit that's activated by a SoftPay self-pay card or a loyalty key fob. Customers with to-go orders can also activate the device with their phone number, according to the company. The customer can review the check and add gratuity before swiping their credit card or gift card.

Tabletop media's device also puts the control in the customer's hands, while allowing a restaurant to market its specials and more. The wireless, interactive solution can be placed at every table, and customers can split the check, add a tip and chose to e-mail or print their receipt at any time during the meal.

"Our tables are turning faster, we think about one and a half times faster, and the servers are making better tips," says Russo at Cozymel's. "We did a survey with 1,000 people asking if they would rather have a server bring them a [payment] device or if they wanted it at their table, and 80 percent wanted it at the table."

The system also allows the company to promote certain items and ask for customer feedback,

and the results can be tracked in real-time. Using a video, Cozymel's showed someone how they make their tableside guacamole, and noticed when customers press the button to see the video, they often ordered the item, Russo notes.

"We also have different margaritas, and we have promoted them as well. We have seen that every time we put something in front of the guests they tend to order it more," she explains. "We have seen a 15 to 20 percent increase in the order of a promoted item."

Additionally, the survey at the end of payment asks customers about the service and how they liked using the payment device. Russo reports that more than 90 percent of customers answer the survey while waiting for their credit card to process, and about 90 percent like the device.

Another bonus is the option to offer customers outside items such as movie tickets to a local theater. Cozymel's partnered with their local movie theater, and the Tabletop Media system runs a movie trailer and offers customers the option to buy tickets in advance at the table. Cozymel's collects \$1 per ticket sold, according to Russo.

"In a few years, pay at the table will be like pay-at-the-pump is now," she explains. "Our repeat customers expect it."

#### **More new and improved**

Both receipt and label printers are sporting new features in the restaurant industry. From labels that stick again and again, to spill-proof hardware, the options continue to grow.

This past April, Epson introduced the TM-T88IV ReStick thermal label printer with repositionable liner-free labeling, supporting both standard and wireless interfaces, from parallel and serial to Ethernet, 802.11b and Bluetooth. Its ReStick liner-free labels can be placed and repositioned multiple times, a plus in the kitchen environment to improve workflow and order accuracy, the company reported.

Also, the latest line of single station thermal printers from Transaction Printer Group ([www.tpgprinters.com](http://www.tpgprinters.com)) became available in December 2007. The A798 and A799 are suited for high-volume printing, with features like an easy-opening cover and drop-in paper loading as well as a spill-resistant cabinet design. Meanwhile, TransAct Technologies ([www.transact-tech.com](http://www.transact-tech.com)) partnered with NCR Corp. ([www.ncr.com](http://www.ncr.com)) in April of this year to offer an integrated printing solution that includes the Ithaca model 8000(r) printer and wireless label solution. It can be used to print receipts at the front of the restaurant as well as receipt labels in the kitchen for special orders, the companies reported.

New from Citizen Systems America is the CT-S310 two-color, high-speed POS thermal printer, which offers 150 millimeters per second print speed and a standard dual interface (USB plus serial, parallel or Ethernet ports) and an optional built-in power base. It is also compatible with Microsoft Windows XP and the new Vista operating systems ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)).

Chosen by Macayo, an 18-location Mexican restaurant chain throughout Nevada and Arizona, the Citizen printer's spill-shield protects the unit from spills and splashes, and the small footprint and front paper discharge allow it to fit into a confined shelf space if necessary.

Another kitchen printer that is both spill-proof and heat resistant is the SP700, a clamshell printer from Star Micronics ([www.starmicronics.com](http://www.starmicronics.com)). It features two-color printing and comes with free software to allow for added graphics like logos or coupons. The company also introduced the TSP100GT to its TSP100 futurePRNT family in April 2008, with a print speed of 45 RMP, and two new colors exclusive to the GT model, Ice White and Piano Black.

But no matter what printer, payment system or other POS peripheral an operator chooses, a small footprint, portability and security are leading the way in today's marketplace.

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