Don’t let the times leave you behind

Customers expect more from the on-trade when it comes to technology

In an age when leaving a mobile phone at home is regarded as something akin to losing a limb, it’s no surprise that technology now has a considerable presence in the on-trade. With the general public becoming used to using their phones and tablets to shop and pay for goods and services, there is a growing expectation that bars and restaurants will incorporate these devices into their offer – and not just for payment.

Hospitality business owners ignore the latest tech at their peril, say specialists.

“Since the launch of the iPhone ten years ago, we have undergone a technology revolution,” said Clive Consterdine, sales and marketing director at EPOS specialist Zonal.

“We are the mobile generation and wherever we go, so does a device. Subsequently, we expect to access free wi-fi wherever we frequent, make a reservation, place an order and spend ‘cash’ using our devices.”

From a licensee’s perspective, embracing this technology is about more than providing a convenient service to customers; it has real financial benefits, said Consterdine.

According to research carried out on behalf of Zonal, 67% of consumers between the ages of 25 and 34 would pay more for drinks if they were able to order them from their smartphones, instead of queuing at the bar. The same research found 69% of respondents cited speed of service as their number one frustration in a venue.

Food and drink aren’t the only aspects of a venue’s offer that customers might want to engage with through their phones. Technology firm Startle supplies a ‘virtual jukebox’ service to the on-trade which allows bar and pub customers to select tracks using their phones.

Managing director Andy Hill said: “It’s not news that we live in a digital world where consumers expect to be given access to everything, on demand. “It is important that operators acknowledge these expectations, especially when it comes to a venue’s technology offering as it plays a pivotal role in a guest’s overall experience.”

And mobile phones are only part of the technology picture.

Contemporary EPOS systems, for example, can provide licensees with a wealth of business information.

“Today customers expect fast and efficient service when they enter any premises whether it’s the local pub or a large city centre premises. "Licensees therefore need a system that can deliver high quality customer service and also offer accurate management information.

“EPOS systems have now become an essential part of businesses, with even the smallest operations relying on technology to reduce service times and improve order efficiency.”

Not all technology will be relevant to all venues, and so it’s important hospitality businesses talk to firms with experience in the industry.

Samantha Weller, commercial manager at EPOS firm Tevalis, advised licensees to regard technology “from an investment and partnership point of view, as this will benefit the business most in the long run”.

“As a company grows so will the technology requirements, so make sure that you buy for the future and partner with a provider that can offer the complete, bespoke solution as one size does not fit all,” said Weller.

Before approaching any companies it can pay to do your research, said Paul Crawford, sales director at wi-fi provider KILTR. He advised licensees to “ask other operators in the trade what they use and how it works for them”.

“Recommendations are still the best way, whether personal or through trade organisations or publications like SLTN,” said Crawford.