



Benefitting from the Right Choice of Payment Systems

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TECHNOLOGY PERMEATES every aspect of our lives with most of us accustomed to using state-of-the-art mobiles, apps and even wearable technology such as prepaid wristbands. In order to stay ahead of this trend, the hospitality sector must ensure that they meet their customers' needs when it comes to paying.

In response to this many bars, restaurants and even hotels have already installed near-field-communication (NFC) enabled terminals which accept the latest payment technology such as Contactless and mobile payments.

A report by Visa found that card users in the UK are by far the biggest adopters of Contactless payments in Europe, with customers valuing the speed and convenience of touch-and-pay technology. Contactless is particularly well-suited to environments with high customer turnover, as transactions can be processed in less than a second. As a result, queues are minimised, more customers are served, overall customer experience improves and profits are boosted.

In contrast, adoption of mobile payments has so far been slow; however, the recent launch of Apple Pay in the UK has the potential to be a 'game changer' in the way consumers pay for things. Apple Pay also uses NFC technology and so hospitality outlets do not have to update their terminals to accept it.

It is highly likely that Apple Pay, as well as other mobile payment providers will integrate rewards and loyalty programmes into their smartphones. This will further increase the attractiveness of mobile phones as a means of payment.

For the hospitality sector, loyalty schemes are useful ways to identify, reward, and retain their best customers. However, running more sophisticated reward schemes than stamp cards or vouchers can be tricky, particularly so for smaller, independent outlets.

Most customers like to have their say and are willing to share

their views especially when they've eaten out, visited a bar or stayed in a hotel. However, many end up not doing so as traditional methods such as customer surveys, polls or internet reviews are time consuming or they are not anonymous. Even searching for a pen sometimes seems like too much effort.

This is where technology comes in, with new services enabling the customer to rate a service or a product when paying by card or their mobile phone. This provides the hospitality manager with honest feedback as the experience is still fresh in the customer's mind.

One such service is provided by truRating, live in UK venues where customers make Chip and PIN payments and will soon be available for Contactless and Apple Pay transactions. Every customer paying by card is asked one question which is rotated from a fixed set of customised questions, to rate the service, experience or product on a scale from 0 to 9 (terrible to great). The rating is anonymous and given by the person paying so it's a real and honest insight about what the customer thinks. This feedback can be accessed the next day and can then be acted on to make sure the outlet provides the best possible service.

By asking specific questions, bars, restaurants and hotels can find out what their customers really think; whether the food was up to scratch, the staff were friendly enough or if the music was too loud. All of these factors have an influence on the overall experience and impact the customer's decision about whether or not they will come back.

Receiving ratings from the point of sale is particularly important for independents that, unlike the big chains, are less able to rely on brand awareness to keep customers coming back. Capturing, comparing and analysing feedback helps outlets to become more accountable and responsive to the needs of their guests. Ultimately, this influences the overall performance of the business and increases customer loyalty.

It is often overlooked that a customer's experience when they pay can have a big impact on their overall impression of a bar, restaurant or hotel. Make it quick and easy and they are more likely to come back. If at the same time you can gather their feedback about the service you have provided - and then act on this - then the chances are that not only will the customer return, they'll recommend you to their friends too.