

Welcome to the foodservice future

Restaurant tech whiz Jim Melvin envisions a future filled with high-touch, customer-operated purchase devices.



Jim Melvin

(which was acquired by PAR Technologies), shared his fascinating vision for the future of foodservice technology. — editor

During November's FS/TECH, the foodservice technology expo held in Long Beach, Calif., industry visionary Jim Melvin, founder of restaurant software developer SIVA Corp.

Prediction: Customers and operators want interactive restaurant technologies.

Many (operators) are eager to use handheld technologies and pay-at-the-table technologies to provide the customer a much better, streamlined solution in the order-taking and food-delivery process. And customers want to use them as soon as they come through the door. We're looking forward to using technologies like kiosks and pay-at-the-table a lot more in the future.

Prediction: Expect substantial changes in ordering and payment systems.

What we see coming in the future is a dramatic fragmentation at the order points and payment points in restaurants. Consumers already want to take and pay for the order at the table or in the car or over the Web. (And the Web) allows customers to make very tight branded relationships with their favorite restaurants. They allow customer preferences to be created so they can place an order on a cell phone or the Web.

Prediction: Restaurants will know their customers better than ever.

At the drive-thru or an (in-store) kiosk, the restaurant will know who you are and what your favorites are. It'll know what my most favorite thing to order is. (Melvin later added that customers will be recognized by

RFID cards, GSM signals from cell phones, key fobs, gift cards or I.D. numbers they could punch in at a kiosk.)

These are opt-in technologies, not Big Brother. The customer — you — decided you wanted to be loyal to Taco Bell, and they have permission, when they see your GSM signal coming from your cell phone, to identify you and do what's appropriate.

Prediction: Cell phones will play increasingly larger roles as customer order platforms.

More and more consumers have cell phones, and we want to use that technology. Once you've opted into the brand, that brand will want to push advertising to the cell phone so (customers) can order from it.

We also want customers to be able to get directions to the nearest brand outlet. The customer needs to be able say, "I want to know where my nearest Taco Bell is, my nearest Wendy's is," and have that pop up in the phone and give directions.

Fact: Making such technology work requires a full understanding of what's going on in the store in real time.

For this to succeed, you have to understand capacity levels at the store, what's already in the kitchen, how many people are in the restaurant, how many orders have already been taken to be able to quote the customer a delivery time or to be able to take the customer's order at all.

We also have technology that reaches into the kitchen with a very expansive kitchen management system we call Intellikitchen. We have several different technologies that display statistics to employees in the store. Then they can understand what the operational efficiencies are in the store, what the guest experience is and how each guest has gone through their cycle in the restaurant.

That information includes how long the customer waited to be seated, and whether the estimate they were given was accurate. How long they waited to get their food, how long they waited to get the check and how long they waited for the check to be picked up once it was delivered.

Prediction: A major foodservice technology cycle is beginning. Hold onto your hats.

The end of a technology cycle is when you're looking for (technology to give you) that last thousandth of a basis point on your food cost or labor. But the beginning of a cycle is when you're trying to drive your revenue, and that's where we are today.

If you look at the 60s and 70s, when drive-thru was changing the industry, PAR was delivering solutions that were different than anyone else. Now a different technology lifecycle is just starting. Whether it's Web ordering, cell-phone ordering or curbside pickup, those things are taking off, and most of our customers like it. ■



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FAST FACTS

46%

Americans who say they are likely to use customer-activated ordering and payment terminals if available in their favorite tableservice restaurant.

71%

Respondents aged 18 to 24 who said they would use the terminals.

64%

Respondents aged 25 to 34 who said they would use the terminals.

About half of the adults and two-thirds of the 18- to 24-year-olds said they would use the device if offered at a quick-service restaurant.

Source:
National Restaurant Association