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Technology is making its mark in the restaurant business. Here are several ways that updated kitchen systems help eateries operate better and more efficiently.

Food automation

Technology can help kitchens run smoothly

Still using printers and receipts to convey orders to the kitchen? That's so 20th century. Within the past decade, the kitchen has become increasingly high-tech. QSR Automations Inc., an industry leader in hardware and software that makes kitchens smarter for franchises like Ruby Tuesday, Applebee's, Chili's and Captain D's Seafood, is betting those old printers and receipts will soon be ancient relics.

There are numerous techno-solutions designed to streamline kitchen operations. QSR's ePicKDS, for example, is a display system at kitchen workstations in table service restaurants that replaces those printed order tickets, explains Dan Linker, director of support services for QSR. Servers key in the orders at kiosks or cash register stations, and they appear onscreen in the kitchen. The new ePic KDX is a "lite" version of the software for quick service environments.

Streamlining the ticket process isn't the full extent of this system,

however. Here are some other things kitchen technology can do:

Improve food quality via precise timing.

"When servers bring receipts or tickets into the kitchen containing a table's order, the steak usually goes on the grill at the same time as the burger and the chicken sandwich, both of which tend to sit under hot lights until the steak is done," Linker explains.

With orders popping up on computerized displays instead of those old tickets, the system can convey precise timing of a table's order—the steak goes on the grill first, followed by other items depending on their cooking times. As a result, everybody at the table gets fresh, hot food.

Track and measure kitchen efficiency.

With printed receipts, there's no way to monitor exactly how fast your kitchen is running. But with smart kitchen technology, it's possible to know exactly what time the orders were placed and how fast they got out of the kitchen. The information is captured electronically within the system, so managers can go back through the data to see how well oiled their machine actually is.

Identify target areas for improvement and training.

Because it's possible to track kitchen efficiency, managers can see the areas that need improvement. Managers can compare volumes and average order times to see if the store is using the right number of personnel. Ruby Tuesday International found this out recently when the company installed a kitchen system from QSR in its corporate and franchised locations. Because all actions are time stamped and captured, the Ruby Tuesday team has immediate

Kitchen systems

like this can help restaurants run more smoothly.

They allow managers to focus on customers and save money in the process.



information for making decisions, analyzing its critical production data, including understanding actual cook times as well as volumes by specific stations or days and dayparts.

“Our kitchens run much more efficiently now, which is giving us improved table turns,” says Nick Ibrahim, senior vice president and chief technical officer for Ruby Tuesday, Inc.

Evaluate the viability of new menu items. When Applebee’s debuts new, seasonal menu items, it evaluates their viability by using kitchen technology to determine how long it takes for those items to make it out of the kitchen. If it takes too long, the item is dropped from the menu.

Transfer your kitchen quarterback. A kitchen manager

is often in the back of the house, making sure orders flow smoothly. After smartening up its kitchens, Ruby Tuesday found this position was no longer necessary.

“We moved our managers out of the quarterback role at the expeditor and put them back in front of guests, which also provides significant savings on labor—and our guests are getting their meals fresher and faster,” says Ruby Tuesday’s Ibrahim.

Save money. Printers, paper, ink, toner all cost money. Yes, so does a whole batch of new technology for your kitchen (cost estimates depend on number of units purchased and other variables) but generally, once it’s in, it’s in. Ongoing maintenance costs are low. **FT**



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- **Czech mate:**
Mail-order brides
- **IFE wrap-up**
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