Turning Tables

Improved table and waitlist management makes ditching paper-based solutions easy.

In today's fast-paced world, customers expect quick, seamless experiences, even in full-service. This means that the familiar low-tech ways of doing business are not only going out of style, they are also a liability that can lead to displeased guests, slower table turnover, and in both cases, lost profits. Table management and waitlist software helps restaurants stay connected to customers and streamline processes; however, overly complicated technology can frustrate employees and increase training costs.

Brian Hutchins, CEO of Waitlist Me, a digital waitlist and table management solution, explains why this software is vitally important and the risks associated with overly complicated systems.

BRIAN HUTCHINS, CEO OF WAITLIST ME, EXPLAINS HOW DIGITAL WAITLIST AND MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS ARE A VITAL PART OF TODAY'S RESTAURANTS.

1. WHY DO RESTAURANT OPERATORS NEED WAITLIST AND TABLE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE? It is so easy for anyone to immediately get answers from Google, rides from Uber, products delivered from Amazon, and more. These types of experiences are shaping what customers look for in service so that waiting for a table seems worse by comparison than it did 10 years ago. The struggle to keep up with these higher expectations and the fear of receiving negative feedback on Yelp and other social networks is causing restaurant operators anxiety. The solution is to serve customers better.

2. WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS TO PAPER SYSTEMS? With a paper waitlist, not knowing how long people have been waiting makes it hard to give customers accurate wait estimates. This frustrates customers and leads to more walkaways and negative reviews. A paper waitlist is also only accessible from one location, whereas a digital waitlist can be checked and managed from multiple devices by several people at once. This helps restaurant staff coordinate better, and gives customers the flexibility to add themselves to the waitlist or check their place in line from anywhere.

3. HOW CAN THE WRONG SOFTWARE MAKE THESE PROCESSES WORSE? Where paper doesn't offer enough information, software often errs in the opposite direction. The more features that are squeezed into the wrong places, the longer it takes to learn and to use the software effectively without frustration and mistakes. Set up and ongoing training costs can be significant, both in terms of time and money spent. All the extra hassle can really hurt the ROI.

4. WHY DID WAITLIST ME DECIDE TO SIMPLIFY? New technologies can take time to reach the mainstream, where people cling to older systems out of inertia and familiarity, and developers need to be careful not to chase after feature requests from early adopters that might lead to unnecessary complexity. We really try to stay focused on the long-term vision of keeping Waitlist Me simple enough for anyone. This past year we had a customer successfully launch Waitlist Me at over 1,500 locations, and the thousands of people they had using Waitlist Me for the first time were able to get up to speed by going through a five-minute self-training script. That's how we think business software should work.

5. HOW DOES WAITLIST ME MAKE FLOORPLANS UNNECESSARY? Using floor plans can be overly complex, although they seem simple. Deciding where to seat the next customer requires a haphazard search across the whole map followed by a complicated process of interpreting a lot of unstructured data. We realized that wait staff don't need a map of tables. What they need is a simple way to know the best place to seat the next customer, so we developed our solution around making that as easy as possible.

Brian Hutchins is a 20-year software product management and marketing veteran with experience at several successful startups and household names like Google, Yahoo, and Colgate Palmolive. As the CEO of Waitlist Me, Brian is improving wait experiences and saving people time. Waitlist Me has helped thousands of businesses serve over 100 million customers.