

Digital Transformation: Demystified

Restaurants are increasingly at the junction point of the physical world colliding with the digital world. As technology becomes more pervasive in both how businesses operate and interact with customers, it's imperative for restaurants to acknowledge the impact and prioritize ways to leverage the changes and opportunities presented by innovation. Here Tim Tang, director, enterprise solutions for [Hughes](#), offers advice on how restaurants must shift their present and future mindsets to embrace the digital transformation of the restaurant industry.

According to HT's 2017 Restaurant Technology Study, increasing employee productivity is a top strategic goal for a quarter of operators. How can technology help achieve this goal? What role should mobile play?

TANG: Video-based training can simplify and streamline employee learning, making it easier for them to watch demonstrations of how to perform tasks associated with their roles. Mobile applications can substantially increase access to that training and help reduce the time it takes to onboard new hires. By increasing convenience and effectiveness, employees are able to "earn while they learn."

Interactive, virtual training technologies can benchmark the performance of specific tasks, such as customer response times, portion control, order efficiency, and food preparation. For employees, what is "measured" matters. When they receive objective feedback in comparison to peers, employees are empowered with the information needed to improve performance.

By strategically leveraging benchmarked Key Performance Indicators, or KPIs, for employee leaderboards, for example, restaurant operators may tap into employee ambition and drive, as well as systematically address performance challenges.

Much is made of customer-facing technologies, but how can back-office technologies or applications be used to positively impact the "front-of-the-house"?

TANG: Employees have the greatest impact on the customer experience. The most effective way to optimize the customer experience is to inspire employees. Video can enable the corporate office to establish a direct relationship with frontline employees. That is critical for conveying the corporate culture consistently from the top without dilution by middle management. When employees are able to be part of a larger brand family, they experience a greater sense of purpose in their work.

Mobile applications that deliver short-form video and interactive training can be a convenient and effective way to support both back-office and front-of-the-store priorities. They are ideal because they can support the full spectrum of employee needs — from the new hire who is learning the ropes to the veteran working towards a higher level position.

What is necessary for a high-performance wireless network? How can a restaurant best support new mobile payment apps?

TANG: With the race for loyalty, Guest Wi-Fi has transformed from a "service of convenience" into a mission-critical aspect of the payment transaction. When Guest Wi-Fi fails, customers have trouble earning and redeeming reward points. Yet, kitchens are notorious sources of Wi-Fi noise and failure. As a result, enterprise-grade Access Points with certified, integrated firewalls must be positioned in dining areas to deliver sufficient coverage for a high-quality customer experience.

Since the customer's Wi-Fi access is only as good as the restaurant's Internet access, operators need to develop adequate strategies to address scenarios (or sites) that involve insufficient access. This may include magnifying available network access virtually, staging employee/customer-facing video content locally on the network, and dynamically monitoring capacity with real-time traffic to avoid the common problem of slow, congested transactions.

While a restaurant may not always control how much Internet access is affordable or available at a particular location, the restaurant always has control over how they use the available access.

With so many guests accessing Wi-Fi, how should restaurants address payment processing, privacy, and end-to-end network security?

TANG: Tokenization and Point-to-Point Encryption (P2PE) are gaining momentum as effective ways to protect customer payment data and dramatically reduce PCI certification scope. However, payment processing is only one critical application in a restaurant's system architecture. Numerous Cloud-based applications enable the customer experience and restaurant operations. Malicious software, such as ransomware, may bring those operations to a halt.

Because payment security alone is insufficient, on-premise Unified Threat Management (UTM) is now required to fully protect a restaurant. On-premise solutions provide for broader site security than hosted or Cloud-based approaches, securing the business at its network edge, protecting its various customer and employee-facing networks from internal and external threats, and providing direct Internet access and security to optimize Cloud application responsiveness. This combination of hardening the security layer at the closest boundary to the business, integrating security scans across both the internal and external traffic flows, and heuristic learning to detect unusual network behavior has proven itself the best approach to securing the restaurant and avoiding costly service disruptions.