

RFID Makes Ordering and Paying for Pizza Easy As Pie

A Florida pizzeria is using RFID so customers can pay for their pies at a self-service kiosk, and the restaurant can keep better tabs on orders.

By Claire Swedberg

May 16, 2007—Diners at City Pizza in West Palm Beach, Fla., no longer need to linger until the wait staff drops off the check once they've finished eating. Instead, they can wave an RFID-enabled card at a self-service kiosk, then pay with a credit card. The technology is also helping the restaurant monitor orders by requiring employees to log into the point-of-sale (POS) system using RFID-enabled wristbands.

The RFID system, made by SoftTouch, was installed a month ago and has already proven its benefits, according to City Pizza owner Larry Jacobi. Not only has it reduced internal theft, but it also enables customers to leave whenever they choose. Employees cannot input an order until they log into the system with their assigned wristbands, each of which has an RFID tag encoded with a unique ID number associated with that specific worker's name. Thus, they can no longer give away free food, and customers don't have to hand over their credit cards to strangers to pay for meals. Instead, they can pay themselves at the kiosk.

SoftTouch's RFID module adds RFID capability to the software company's SoftTouch POS system already in use at 1,000 retail locations, says SoftTouch president Mike Paycher. The new module has been deployed at City Pizza and other locations, and includes the self-service kiosk and an RFID interrogator that can be connected to the existing SoftTouch POS system. The module also includes RFID-enabled cards, key fobs and wristbands containing passive 125 kHz tags compliant with the ISO 11784 standard. The key fob system is designed for loyalty programs that document what customers order over time, allowing them to accumulate credits they later can redeem for free merchandise. City Pizza is not yet using the loyalty key fob, Jacobi says, but may consider it sometime in the future.

Before implementing the RFID system, waiters and waitresses had to punch codes into the POS system to begin or update an order. Now, they select wristbands at the start of their shifts, and the POS system's reader scans the ID number encoded to each wristband's RFID tag. Employees also place their fingers on a biometric scanner, which matches fingerprints with employee names, then correlates the names with the wristband ID numbers.

"The wristband is like the best thing we ever did," says Jacobi. Previously, staff could punch in a manager's code or use some other means to bypass the system and order free food for friends, or entirely avoid ringing up food for which a customer was charged. "Now it is much more secure," Jacobi says. "Every time an employee starts a new check, they use their wristband. I think it's a pretty solid system."

A waiter or waitress taking a customer's drink order goes to the POS system and uses the wristband to access the system. As the wrist comes within range of the reader—which happens as soon as the employee begins using the POS system—it captures the wristband's tag ID number, which is linked to that person's name in the

POS system. That immediately opens access to the POS, allowing the worker to select the drink choices made for that specific table.

RELATED_ARTICLES The waiter or waitress then places an RFID-enabled card near the reader, both provided by Trossen Robotics. The interrogator reads the RFID card's ID number, linking it with the order just entered into the POS system. Returning to the diners, the employee then places the RFID-enabled card on the table and continues to add orders to the check in the POS system.

Once the customers are ready to leave, rather than waiting for the bill, they may take the card to the SoftTouch self-service kiosk and place it near the interrogator. The reader scans the card, causing the POS system to display the bill. The diner can then review what was ordered, add a gratuity, select the credit card option to be used for payment (such as Master Card or Visa) and insert the card into the kiosk.

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