



Staff Management in Restaurants: ISSUES IN TRACKING, Scheduling and Other Aspects

- by Mr. Afiq Jauhari, Marketing Executive cum Copywriter

A According to a research done by the National Restaurant Association (NRA) (2013), the largest foodservice association in the world, restaurant-industry sales are projected to total more than USD660 billion in 2013 and will equal 4% of the U.S. gross domestic product.

In the country, the industry's job growth outpaced the nation's overall economy in 13 consecutive years from 2000 to 2012, proving its ability to sustain itself even during periods of economic recession. The restaurant industry is projected to employ 13.1 million people (roughly 10% of the U.S. available workforce) in 2013 and market trends predict that it will continue to rise by 9% over the next decade.

The previous statistics are also indicative of global trends in the food & beverage industry, particularly 'full-service' (conventional) and 'quick-service' (fast-food) restaurants, and managing the large number of employees involved often implicates the same, universal issues that plague other industries. This

includes concerns such as buddy-punching, tardiness, absenteeism and payroll calculations. There are also other issues at play, in which some are usually only existent in the restaurant industry as the operations involved are different from most businesses. All of these concerns, however, can be remedied or at least brought down to a minimal level.

This article will continue to discuss about the main problems faced when managing these restaurant employees, as well as examine how FingerTec solutions, particularly biometric time clocks & its management software, can provide relief to management when dealing with these concerns.

Dissecting Main Issues of Restaurant Staff



Just like in any other business operations, tracking staff attendance is necessary in the restaurants industry as it is the only way of assessing if an employee is truly 'putting his time in', or has simply 'played a fool'. This is vital as the calculation of the exact hours that an employee works will give a clear indication of how much remuneration the person deserves, and this is the main underlying concept under efficient payroll management; the company tracks how much work is done by an employee and pays accordingly (Brawley, 2011). However, this is easier said than done as restaurant operations involve industry-specific concerns that may complicate matters for the management.

One of the chief concerns circulating in the industry is often the level of technical expertise present in current restaurant employees that turns implementations of even slightly complicated systems into a monumental exercise of ensuring adherence to the said system. This issue is particularly more prevalent in quick-service restaurants as compared to full-service ones, but it is nevertheless still a major concern in both situations. On average, more than 60% of the staff in the restaurant industry are high school graduates without a college degree, and this group of workers are not normally comfortable to use systems that seem complex to them (Fields, 2007).

Another key issue concerning the management of restaurant staffs is the high number of part-time employees that come in during peak seasons. This is even more so in urban areas, where the difference in customers coming in during peak hours, days or periods can balloon up to more than 3 times as compared to normal operations (Schmid-

gall, Hayes, & Ninemier, 2002). To accommodate this spike in demand, most restaurants will employ part-timers specifically for those time periods, and these temporary workers are often not included in the restaurant's original staffing schedules that make manually tracking them an inefficient practice.

Thirdly, the variance in staff tasks also makes it hard to track these employees' true amount of work put in. This scenario occurs because in most establishments, most front-line workers are not task-specific in the sense that they only have one or a few job responsibilities, but instead rotates between having to serve other areas of the business (NPD Group, 2013). For example, in a quick-service restaurant, a full-time waitress may have to wait tables between 2pm to 6pm, answer delivery calls between 6pm to 10pm, and clean up shop between 10pm to 11pm. This schedule will then be rotated with another waitress for another day. The complexities involved often causes headaches to management, both in trying to ascertain the workers' true amount of hours worked as well as the just scheduling of employee tasks.

On top of all these tasks, there are also general and universal issues regarding staff management that can be found in both the restaurants industry as well as most industries at large. This may include tailgating, buddy-punching, and other 'illnesses' for the management to deal with. The next section of this article will discuss how FingerTec solutions can remedy these issues as well as the previously mentioned ones above, and ultimately improve a restaurant's overall business operations.

A Recipe for Success via Biometrics

Among the key concerns mentioned above, none of them are insurmountable tasks with the help of today's technological advances. There exists various tools that can help alleviate the troubles faced in the restaurants industry in terms of staff management, one of them being biometric time clocks. These devices are used to assist in tracking the hours worked by an employee of a company, but instead of using a key, code or chip to identify the user, they rely on a unique attribute of the user such as fingerprints or facial recognition. The usage of these devices, along with a proper data management application for tracking and scheduling*, will be more than adequate to face the current issues mentioned in the previous section.

**Products from FingerTec Worldwide, a provider of biometric solutions for time attendance and access control, will be used as examples to explain how these issues are solved.*

Pertaining to the initial problem of low technical expertise among employees, and their reluctance to use complicated systems, the real trouble lies in finding a system that is both easy-to-use but still holds the adequate features needed for the business. Previously, punch card systems were heavily used as it did its job in recording attendance, but this has given headaches to management when trying to compile those data for payroll calculations. On top of being time-consuming on both fronts (the recording of data as well as its further processing), this system has also led to problems such as buddy-punching, whereby a worker dishonestly clocks in for another worker without the management's knowledge. This is where the biometric solution helps the most.

When implementing biometric time clocks, such as FingerTec's **TA100C**, the process is simplified at all stages of implementation and usages. This will directly affect the workers involved in the sense that less time will be needed to record attendance, as fingerprint verifications with the device takes less than a second. In a sense, front-line workers would benefit the most from this as it saves them a lot of time and hassle when having to clock their attendance. In terms of processing the data for viewing or payroll calculations, the operations are also made easier to process as all data recorded by the device will be sent to its free bundled software, FingerTec's **Time Clock Management Software (TCMS V2)**, for automated management purposes. Furthermore, the user-interface used in both the device as well as the accompanying software are simple to learn and operate, requiring minimal technical know-how from the restaurant staff.

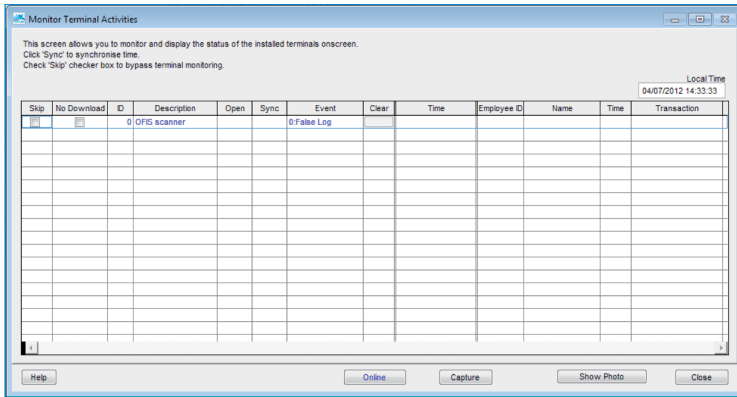
Moving on to the second major issue in the restaurants industry, there needs to be a way to minimize the operations involved when having to schedule extra workers during peak periods. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that there is a high turnover rate among restaurant staffs, which leads to not just a high number of changes in employee scheduling but also during enrollment and removal of workers into the system. It is simply inefficient for the management to spend significant amounts of time on these operations, when there are also other things to worry about in the business. Using a FingerTec system helps to relieve this.

Restaurants that has installed biometric time clocks, such as FingerTec's **AC100C**, can easily enroll users within a few steps at the device itself, saving management precious time that can be used elsewhere. This method is highly suitable for quickly adding individual users, but there are no issues when adding a larger number of users at a time. This is so because the process can also be done through a PC via the usage of the TCMS V2 software and FingerTec's **OFIS-Y** reader, the USB plug-and-play fingerprint reader that enables you to easily enroll fingerprints. Scheduling issues are also tackled with the software, as TCMS V2 can easily support up to 999 schedules that can be easily configured to suit individual business needs, all in a friendly UI that makes everything look easy to the user.

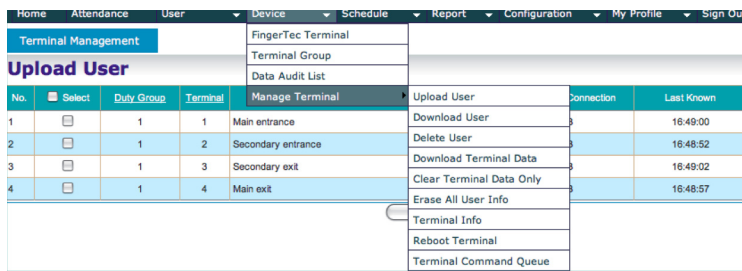
Last but not least is the issue of rotating variable job tasks among workers' schedules. Originally, this practice is done to ensure that all front-line staff will divide their work evenly between tasks such as waiting on tables, answering calls and clean-up duties. Although the intended goal of this practice is admirable, it is nevertheless painful for management to consistently come up with new schedules, especially with the high turnover rates and part-time staffers in the industry. As previously mentioned, these problems are brought to a null with automated data management software such as TCMS V2 or even FingerTec's **TimeTec Web**, a web-based time attendance management application that makes it both fast and easy to make scheduling changes.

To see these features in action, see the screenshots in the next page.





Monitoring and tracking staff attendance is easy, as all data are automatically updated into TCMS V2.



In TimeTec Web, administrators can also suspend users for a variety of reasons or durations which makes it easier to accommodate peak hour workers.



Trimming the Fat in Your Business Operations

Implementing a biometric system such as the one from FingerTec Worldwide can prove to be very beneficial to restaurants and is particularly crucial to the industry as it is rather labor-intensive. On the whole, the improvements that can be achieved with the system helps to do more than just reduce the time and effort spent on 'traditional' time & attendance practices, but also to ensure efficient allocation of the company's resources. At the end of the day, costs go down while profits go up as staff can concentrate on other value-adding tasks for the business.

Although it may seem costly at first to install a biometric system for your establishment, the long-term (and in some cases, immediate) benefits and savings that one can achieve with biometric time clocks and proper data management software will definitely outweigh the initial cost of implementation. As the restaurants industry moves ahead in the future, efficiency will be key for all businesses to grow and having a reliable time & attendance system will push any organization in that general direction.

References

- Brawley, W. (2011). *Restaurant Owners Uncorked*. Seattle: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Schmidgall, R., Hayes, D., & Ninemier, J. (2002). *Restaurant Financial Basics*. New Jersey: Wiley.
- Fields, R. (2007). *Restaurant Success by the Numbers*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press.
- National Restaurant Association. (2013). *2013 Restaurant Industry Pocket Factbook*. Washington: NRA Washington.
- NPD Group. (2013). *Restaurant Industry Trends*. San Francisco: www.npd.com.