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Movin' on up: Perkins upgrades its POS to the MICROS 3700 and Workstation 4

Perkins Restaurant & Bakery, noted for delectable puffy pancakes offered all day long, and a wide variety of all-American entrees, draws diners in 35 states and four Canadian provinces. The chain consists of 156 company-owned restaurants and 338 franchised units.

For such a large restaurant operation, a rugged, low-maintenance point-of-sale (POS) system is essential, and Perkins found just the right fit with MICROS's 3700 POS system running on MICROS's Workstation 4 hardware.

STICKING TO WHAT WORKS

In 2000, Perkins began a search for a new POS system to replace the one that it had been using since 1995. Perkins put out a request for proposal and "met with all the big gun" vendors, said Carla Bray, manager of restaurant automation for Perkins, who has been with the company for 17 years. In the end, Bray credited the decision to go with the MICROS 3700 system to Perkins' longstanding relationship with MICROS, which provided the company's previous system. "We've had a successful relationship with MICROS throughout the

years, and wanted to continue building on those successes."

Between 2000 and 2002, Perkins installed the 3700 in about 40 stores, most of them new. But that was not the end of the story. In fact, it was just the beginning.

HARDWARE MADE EASY

Perkins had been running its new POS software on MICROS's Eclipse PC Workstation until last May when MICROS introduced the Workstation 4 (WS4), a Windows CE .Net terminal for the hospitality industry. According to Bray, it was just what Perkins had been waiting for. "When we saw the WS4, we knew it would be the thing that would allow us to convert all the stores to the new system."

The WS4 can be described as a "smart" terminal, possessing no moving parts such as fans or hard drives, making it easier to operate and less expensive to maintain than traditional PC counterparts. Its "brains" are contained in a chip-based compact flash "personality module," which can be easily popped out of a non-functioning terminal and inserted into a new terminal.

The WS4 has simplified day-to-day operations for Perkins because of its user-friendly design. When turned on, the WS4 "syncs up" with the MICROS server in the back of the restaurant, where all the data resides, and retrieves the totals necessary to resume business.

The WS4's unique design, which requires almost zero maintenance and is more cost-effective than a traditional PC-based terminal, is a huge benefit of the system, said Bray, who added that she is also looking forward to taking advantage of MICROS's low-cost "depot maintenance" plan, whereby new units are shipped via FedEx to replace malfunctioning ones.

"It's very easy to replace the module, and you don't have to pay for onsite maintenance," she said.

Bray also appreciates the larger touchscreen color monitor on the WS4, which features a floor plan of each restaurant. Servers simply touch the table they are serving and begin inputting menu items. "This system is wonderful for training new servers," she said. "They pick up on it faster. Before, new servers



Courtesy of Perkins Restaurant & Bakery

could never remember their table numbers."

GET ROLLING

The process of installing the WS4 began last April, and according to Bray, "A lot of our work was already done for us at the stores that had the MICROS 3700 installed."

In July 2003, the first pilot test store, in Collierville, Tenn., near Perkins' Memphis headquarters, was launched. Bray was there with her IT people until 2 a.m. the first day, "so we could see everything that was going on." She said few problems came up and they were all resolved very quickly with assistance from the MICROS 24/7 help desk. Soon after, the WS4 was installed in the remaining 22 corporate stores and in at least one "training store" in every major market, as well as two franchised stores (in Minnesota and Canada). In January of this year, the rollout continued in Bloomington, Minn., where one of the larger stores near the Mall of America was outfitted with eight WS4

terminals.

Altogether, the rollout went smoothly. Perkins supports the POS terminals via an in-store LAN with two back-office servers (one is a back-up), which run the 3700 application and Perkins' home-grown back-office system, PRISM (Perkins Restaurant Information Systems Manager), which handles daily sales/cash reporting, inventory and payroll, and labor scheduling. Perkins also wrote an end-of-day program that channels POS data to the PRISM system and the schedule back into POS. Back-

office systems now run on Windows 2000. Store results are sent to the corporate office via satellite.

So far, in all locations, Bray describes the terminal and software as a "very stable" system. "It has improved order entry and credit card authorization, and it has great features that make the job easier for our servers, like the ability to automatically split checks." The new system also allows gift cards and more customized reports, she added.

Bray said that the cost of the installation — even at a store with six terminals — is very affordable, and she expects it to last "at least five to 10 years down the road."

As for the rest of 2004, Bray said, "We've gotten approval to roll the system out to all of the corporate stores. And we'll convert any interested franchisees to the new system as well."

Once managers and employees learn the system, "they love it," said Bray, and the word is spreading. "I get a call every day from the stores still using the previous system asking, 'Where am I on the schedule?'" **SS**



Courtesy of Perkins Restaurant & Bakery