terminal to log the purchase with the host system. Management can then reward the customer according to their own system. The better loyalty card systems, like Fishbowl and MICROS, also allow customers to log into the rewards system via the internet and see the status of their own rewards. Providing this service also allows operators an additional opportunity to market their customers.

In the future, look for customer loyalty systems to not only track the number of dollars individual customers spend, but to also track individual customer purchases. By knowing specifically what it is that each individual customer orders, management can tailor marketing campaigns to customers based on their personal buying habits. If, for instance, customers spend a lot of money on menu items that are not as profitable as others, they can be offered promotions designed to steer them to different menu items. Customers who are already buying the more profitable menu items will be offered promotions designed to bring them in more often.

HAND-HELD TERMINALS

Hand-held terminals have gained in popularity recently as the size of such units has decreased even as memory and capabilities have increased dramatically. Generally speaking, these terminals are best suited to environments where either speed is of the essence or distances to server work stations are great, like pool areas and stadiums. Because the units are necessarily small, the screens are also. This makes the use of hand-held units for extensive menus very problematic.

When using hand-held devices it is often preferable to utilize all-in-one units, units that include signature capture, credit card reading, and printing capabilities. Because the use of hand-held devices is best when speed is required or large distances need to be covered it is best not to require servers to traverse large distances to process checks. Hand-held devices are often not well suited to fine dining environments or more casual restaurants where guests often have special requests. The units take away from the aesthetic appeal of such restaurants and the higher number of special requests that guests make in these environments might actually cause servers to spend more time at the table than they would if they only had to write down the order and input it to a larger, more capable POS terminal.

Hand-held terminals for generic use are available from many vendors like ActionSystems and Pocket Cheff. These terminals are made to interface with a variety of different POS systems. They do, however, carry the same caveat as other generic options, namely the necessity for separate service and customer support functions. And while these systems are ostensibly made to interface with a variety of POS systems, it is always best to test them thoroughly before making a purchase decision.