

Taking your order – wirelessly

Boiseans tout P.O.S. system for restaurants using PDAs

By Lora Volkert
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Steve Lipkin always wanted to own a sports bar.

In 2001 he opened Stubs Sports Pub on Chinden Boulevard, west of Five Mile Road, leaving behind the demands of his sales job at Boise software firm Extended Systems Inc.

But he didn't leave behind his tech outlook. He was quick to equip the wait staff with something other than pad and pencil for taking orders.

"Coming from the world of Extended Systems, I always knew a PDA would work much better in a restaurant setting," Lipkin, 39, said. "It'd be much more efficient taking an order."

Point-of-sale or POS software typically features touch-screen buttons with menu items that, when pressed, list the item on a computer screen in the kitchen so cooks can start filling the order as it's taken.

In restaurants where customers give their orders to cashiers at a counter, it makes sense to equip cash registers with full-size touch screens and POS software. But heretofore at sit-down restaurant, waiters and waitresses had to write down orders at a table, then walk to the closest touch-screen and punch them in.

Not so when the wait staff has handheld computers.

There were no POS systems that operated on handheld devices four years ago – at least none that Lipkin was aware of – so he contacted Ray Nelson, a friend who worked as an assistant engineer at ComputerLand, and Mike Lydon, the former head of Extended Systems' software development team, to develop the software.

In addition to order-taking features, the software tracks inventory usage, daily sales, and customer purchases for frequent customer reward programs; stores data like customer addresses for home delivery; and assists managers with reporting wages.

Lipkin said he and his partners knew when they embarked on the project that it could be made into a business. That happened sooner than they thought.

The manager of the Boise Hawks came into Stubs one day for lunch and, after watching his order being taken on a PDA, told Lipkin their system would be perfect for concessions at the stadium.

They started working on a version of the software called Stadia for the ballpark and in 2002 formed Khamu Solutions LLC to market the software. Lipkin had just read a *National Geographic* article about Sherpas and decided to use "khamu," the Sherpa word for "genius" or "brilliant," for the company name.

Eight months ago, Khamu, officed on Chinden near Eagle Road, had finished a version of restaurant point-of-sale software, called Spectra, that was ready to market. The company



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Mike Lydon and Steve Lipkin, formerly of Extended Systems.

offers its software directly to restaurants and ballparks, and resells Dell PDAs and desktop touch screens.

So far Khamu, which has three part-time employees besides its founders, has just a handful of clients, most of them in the Boise area – among them, Angell's Bar & Grill and Siam Thai in Boise and Primo's Pizza in Meridian. But larger prospects loom.

Food Services of America, a wholesale distributor that serves restaurants, hospitals and schools (*IBR*, 08-01-05), has begun partnering with Khamu. FSA has begun using Boise as a test market for Khamu products, said Boise-area FSA president Hans Schatz.

Khamu's system integrates with a software product FSA offers called Profit Manager, which helps restaurateurs track

ingredient costs, reorder inventory and calculate profit. Together, the software systems automate functions like inventory management.

With non-integrated systems, Schatz said, restaurant managers would have to take inventory data tracked by the POS system and re-enter the numbers for each inventory item in Profit Manager to calculate how much of each ingredient should be reordered. But because Spectra and Profit Manager “talk” to each other, the computer can do that step instead of a restaurant manager, increasing productivity.

“There’s a lot of POS systems out there, but none of them communicate, and ours do,” Schatz said.

Schatz said FSA hopes to offer Khamu software in all its distribution areas. That could be a boon to Khamu, because Seattle-based FSA has close to 500



sales representatives that call on restaurants, hospitals and other institutions.

At about the same time Khamu debuted its system, many other POS vendors, including Micros and Digital Dining, created PDA offerings.

But because Khamu’s system was developed with a wireless format, it was built using a Web browser-based architecture that isn’t used by most of its competitors.

The browser base allows Khamu to incorporate certain functions, notably a remote management function allowing restaurateurs to, for instance, check sales data or edit menus anytime from anywhere on a website, according to Lipkin.

To get those features on other systems, he said, restaurants usually have to buy additional third-party software.

Khamu’s software costs \$3,500 for a restaurant of any size, not including hardware, installation or training.

Though it has taken him away from his sports pub – Lipkin now puts in just one shift a week at Stubs – he doesn’t mind being back in the technology world.

“After four years, I had kind of an itch to get out there too,” he said.

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