



THE INFORMANT TIP-TRAY FEATURES

- Built-in calculator.
- Holds checks, coins, bills and credit cards.
- Wireless connection to the restaurant manager.
- Built-in survey system that compiles data about a customer's visit

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RESTAURANTS GO HIGH-TECH

Designers crank out devices that promise to help managers run efficient businesses

By Steve Caulk

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The best tip for the wait staff after your next dining experience might come not from your wallet, but from your heart.

A high-tech development in the restaurant industry has made customer feedback — previously so easy to ignore in postcard form — almost part of the dining experience.

Recently refined by Dallas-based Long Range Systems, Inc., the Informant tip-tray includes a built-in calculator, wireless connection to the restaurant manager, and a built-in survey system that compiles the data and ultimately sends it to a computer server for creation of customized reports.

The same length and width as the low-tech plastic tip tray, the Informant holds checks, coins, bills and credit cards — while also hold-

ing the future of some restaurants in its microchip grip.

It was on display among other high-tech restaurant gadgets at the recent Westex Show in Denver. The show highlights new products and services for the food service industry.

The Informant tip-tray contains a read-out window that presents short survey questions to the restaurant patron. For example: "How was your service?" and "How was the Special of the Day?" and "How did you like the wait staff's new pink-and-black checkered cummerbunds?" — whatever the restaurant management deems important to know.

Patrons answer the questions by pressing appropriate buttons, such as Good or Poor, on the tip-tray.

Some restaurants will program the Informant to buzz the manager's pager when-

ever someone presses the "Poor" button.

To encourage completion of the survey, restaurant management can set the Informant to award patrons at random with a free appetizer upon their next visit, said Molly Morris, spokeswoman for Long Range.

A 10-tray system, with software license and hardware, will cost about \$4,600. Pizza Hut and Pizzeria Uno are Long Range's biggest clients, rotating the equipment around the chains.

"Pizza Hut said it took less than a month for it to pay for itself," said Chantilly Berryman of Long Range.

The company recently established a system that allows the devices to connect with the Internet, for instant reports.