

THE ROMANIAN SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS AND THE BUSINESS REPUTATION

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of the analysis of the way in which new communication and IT technologies are used in the service domain from Romania. The analysis was made at the level of some public alimentation services (restaurants) from Bucharest that are using the existing communication and IT technologies at this moment. It will present the advantages and disadvantages of using some ERP-s (MicroRestaurant, Alfa Software) and software programmes (POSnet, Soft OK, BITS2OFF, PYN, DeverFood, Rikeeper, WizRetail, CostGuard, Sedona). The paper has also as purpose to find solutions of increasing the performance of employees and customer satisfaction through the implementation of some new IT technological solutions. The managers of these companies want the IT specialists to come with some modern solutions which could lead to obtaining some economical results. The collaboration between these ones must be an active and responsible one. Finally, the paper presents an IT technological solution and a communication one found in a development stage in some restaurants and in an implementation stage in others. The analysed IT solution is the result of the collaboration between IT specialists and restaurant managers without whom the results would not be possibly measurable.

Keywords: IT innovation, business reputation, business applications, technological change

JEL Classification: M15, O39.

1. Introduction

The present paper makes an analysis of the way in which the IT and communication technology is exploited by the restaurant managers from Bucharest in their daily activity. The ERP-s and software programmes which are offered at this moment answer to a great part of the identified problems. On one hand, employees must be supported by an IT technological solution in order to be more efficient and to satisfy the customers' requirements in a short time, without affecting the quality of services. On the other hand, customers are more and more attentive to the quality of services wanting to be served fast and well.

The competition in this field is very big and makes the management be preoccupied to find solutions of improvement of developed activities. Lack of personnel management has become a problem that must be solved. Their reputation is given by the human resource that is increasingly hard to find. The restaurant management is interested to keep a record of waiters' orders, of receipts, stocks and raw material, of necessary products, paid bills, different daily/weekly/monthly reports, customers, suppliers,

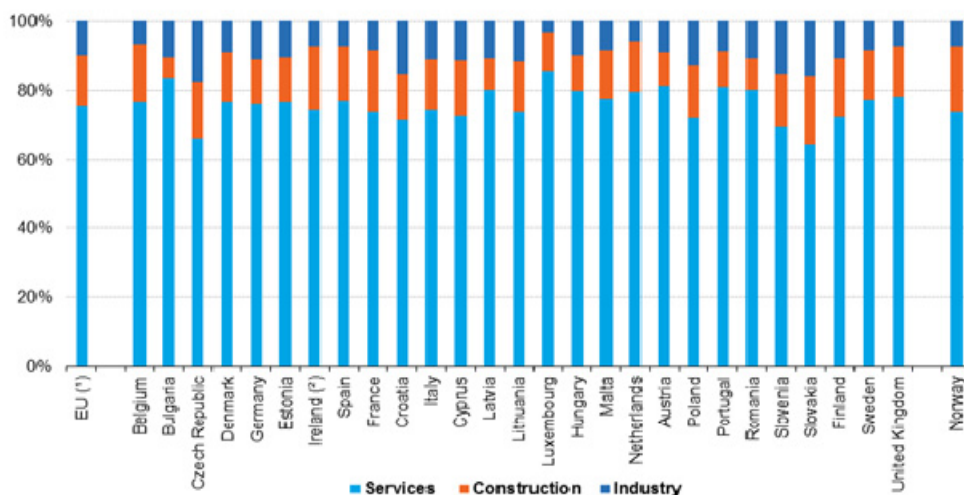
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promotional offers, etc. Another objective of the management is a control over employees. Knowing the number of orders taken by waiters daily, of receipts, splitting orders into bar and kitchen ones, taking over more orders and the flexibility in taking orders are several answers which these solutions offer to the restaurant management.

2. Applications business software in the service sector

The service sector from Romania has known a significant development in the last years due to its development at a global level. Thus, in a monthly report of the National Institute of Statistics, they stipulate that “in the first three trimesters of 2015 in comparison with 2014, the service branch participated to the GDP growth with 2.7 per cent compared to the following branch (industry) which participated only with 0.5 per cent of a 3.7 per cent total registered increase” [INS, (2015)]. This report emphasises also the volume of the turnover for services “Hotel and restaurants which met an increase of 107.3 per cent in 2015, which is 13.1 per cent more than in 2014”[INS, (2015)].

Regarding the evolution of the number of companies from this sector in report with the others, at the level of the European Union (2013), the situation is presented in figure no. 1.



(*) EU-28 excluding Greece

(†) Ireland - 2012 data.

Source: Eurostat Statistics Explained: Structure of active enterprises by sector, business economy, 2013 (%)

We can notice that in all the EU countries, the number of companies which have activities in the service sector surpasses 60 per cent of the total of active companies, reaching 80 per cent in Romania next to Hungary, Portugal, the Netherlands, Bulgaria and

others. The fewest service companies are in Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, but even here they reach over 60 per cent of the total developed economical activities.

This growth forces the service companies to offer quality and differentiated services in order to deal with the tough competition. It is necessary to make, implement and improve some IT technological solutions in this domain. Managers must adapt to the new innovations from the technology domain and they must apply them in their companies. A good manager will know how to deal with the customers' requirements and to develop the business using technological innovations. Specialists from the IT domain are interested in answering the managers' requirements and in developing also other solutions adapted to the business developed by them.

2.1. Applications business software in present

The present study is the result of the analysis of the web-sites of some companies which offer technological solutions for restaurants, publications from the IT domain, web-sites of some restaurants from Bucharest, as well as the result of some interviews with the managers from the restaurants which have IT systems implemented in the activity that they run.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the IT technological solutions implemented in restaurants.

The objectives of the study were:

1. Identifying the IT technological and communication solutions implemented in the restaurant.
2. Evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of using these solutions at the level of consumers and of company management.
3. Identifying some IT technological and communication solutions which could improve the current Erp-s and software programmes applied in the restaurant.

The evaluation of restaurants is made at the moment by specialists in the domain, by ambient, quality and way of presenting the offered food and service quality. The analysed forums regarding the customers' opinion concluded that the most serious problems of the restaurant managers are: lack of personnel, lack of qualified personnel who could answer the customers' needs, waiting for the kitchen orders for too long, the quality of the offered food, etc. I did not see on any forum unsatisfactions regarding location or ambient, most of them being strictly connected to the restaurant personnel. Regarding the IT system used in the restaurant, there are implemented ERP-s and software programmes.

Among the implemented ERP-s I identified: Alfa Software (an ERP for business solutions and not necessarily for restaurants which works for touchscreen and mobile devices with Android/iOS) and MicroRestaurant (for restaurants, taking over from tablets and mobile phones). These IT solutions solve a series of management problems of restaurants such as: they offer a control of waiters regarding the orders taken by them,

receipts, orders split into bar and kitchen, situation of stocks of raw material and goods, necessary supply, different reports that the management needs. They also present the graphic representation of the tables from the location, taking orders by waiters on touchscreen or mobile phones, splitting orders into bar and kitchen, issuing the bill, issuing the receipts and invoices (for the customers who ask for an invoice).

Among the advantages identified in using the current ERP-s: optimisation of customers' waiting time, waiters' much higher working speed, automatical splitting of internal orders (bar, kitchen), fast operation of orders if waiters take over orders on telephones, control of waiters, obtaining sales reports fast, more efficient management activity, promotional offers, sales on product groups, keeping some primary accounting, emphasising sales on more workstations, possibility of paying the bill cash/card/meal tickets/loyalty bonuses, using the integrated equipments (printers at the bar and kitchen, cash register, POS, barcode readers), increase of customers' satisfaction, etc. Among the identified disadvantages: running out of phone battery (in the case of some waiters the phones run out of a battery twice in an 8 hour working day and they have to take orders on paper after which they introduce them on touchscreen and this is how the time of transmitting orders to the bar or kitchen and of course the customers' waiting time increase), errors between the touchscreen and the cash register (differences due to the software), errors on some reports (due to the incorrect operation of waiters), long time for preparing waiters for using ERP-s without generating operation errors.

Among the software programmes used in the restaurants from Bucharest, I identified: SEDONA (developed after 2010, applications on Android and IOS), Wiz Retail Front-Office Restaurant, MENU (the waiter has a tablet with the updated application and menu), Pyn, DeverFood, Rikeeper, BITS2OFF, Soft OK, Freya Restaurant, POSnet, APPY, etc. These software programmes also ensure the administration of the restaurant activity, help obtaining complex information regarding sales, stocks of raw material, goods and finite products and they allow taking orders faster (on touchscreen, but most of them allow taking orders on tablets as well if they have a WiFi connection and if they are approximately 350 m far from the router). Other things that the software programmes do are to allow customer loyalty, to monitor the waiters' activity (if they do not use their colleagues' password when they introduce orders), to integrate a series of equipments necessary for developing the activity (cash registers, fiscal printers, barcode readers, scales), to define recipes for the products from the kitchen, bar, etc.

The advantages of using these software programmes are: more efficient operational activity, increasing sales, supporting the activity of managers in taking decisions, decreasing the customers' waiting time, not mixing the orders from the kitchen, using the full capacity of the restaurant, decreasing the number of unsatisfied customers, differentiation on the market, obtaining a constant quality, improving the reputation of the restaurant and of course the customers' trust. The identified disadvantages would be: limiting production, the hired personnel could not know the way of using the software or they could hurry up to introduce orders and could not allow the proper attention, the

personnel could also not use their own password, hence the sales reports could not be real. A part of these disadvantages can be eliminated if the management do their best to train and control the subordinated personnel.

See below the flow of a restaurant from receiving the customers to their leaving the restaurant (figure 2):

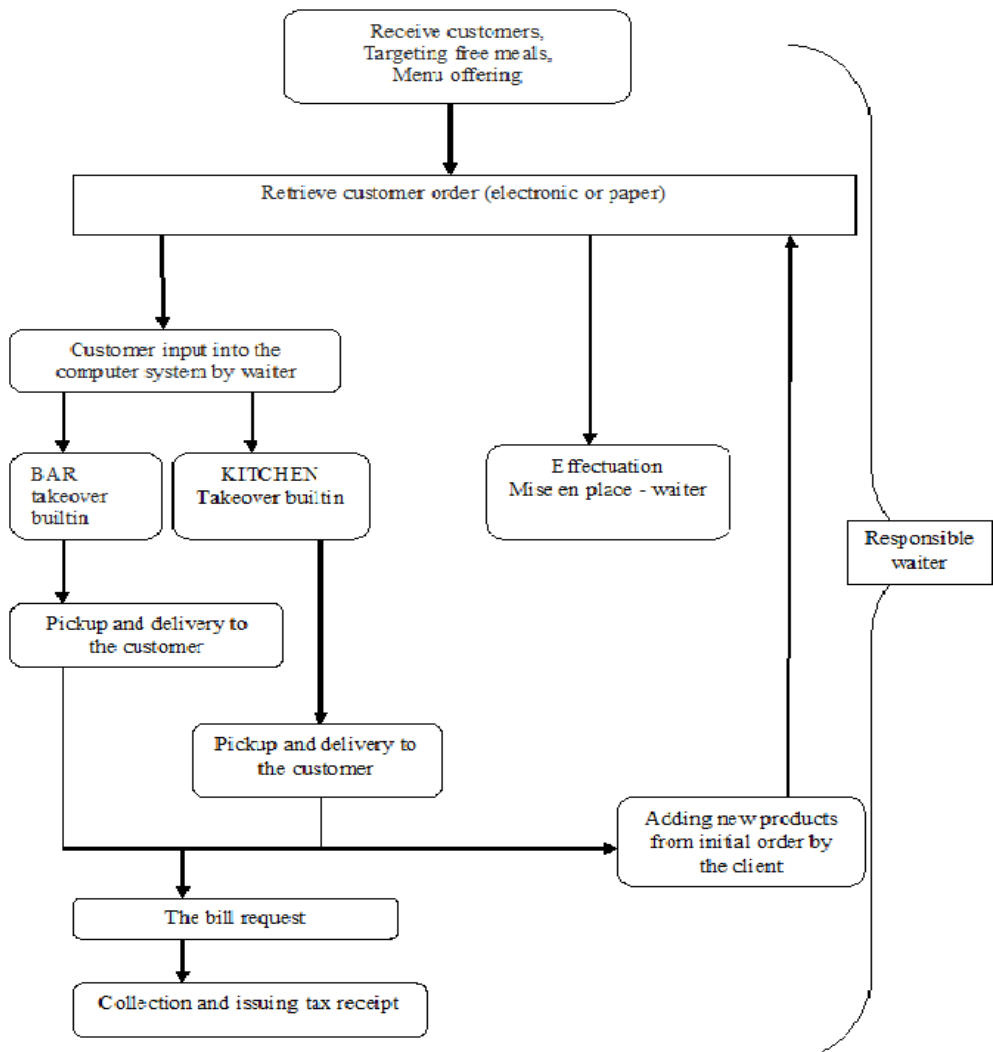


Figure 2. Flow of customer receiving-leaving, responsible employee (waiter)

In the author's opinion the restaurant management must be preoccupied to hire qualified personnel that has to be familiar even from the beginning with the working

procedures and software/ERP used in the location. Even if the time spent with training such personnel is longer, the following results will be positive for the location. Their present problem is exactly the qualified personnel that starts missing. Due to the fact that there are no vocational schools in the domain, the number of specialty highschoools is small, the qualification courses are expensive for those who are interested, companies are forced to hire unqualified personnel and qualify them at the job and to pay for the short term qualification trainings (3 months). A solution to the personnel problem could be implementing an IT system that could transmit a part of the responsibilities directly to the customer.

2.2. Applications business software in the future

As a solution to the problems that the restaurant managers are facing at the moment regarding the lack of personnel and the lack of qualified personnel, I identified the use of the new existing technologies in the business. Both technology and the existing innovative techniques can be optimum solutions for this activity. The preoccupations of IT specialists to create new solutions in order to ease the activities from any domain are continuous.

The development of the equipments necessary to the IT applications created the managers' possibility to be involved and open. The collaboration between IT specialists and managers is vital and recognised by both parts. No solution can be efficient if there is no possibility to be practically tested. Due to this managers must be open minded to new things. The companies' owners must receive explanations that these new things need additional costs that will be paid off in a short period of time.

The more and more performant tablets, the mobile phones with the possibility of saving new IT applications are the managers' solution for the moment. Another solution would be the use of AiAi robots as the customer's personal assistant, but at this time the solution would be a little less expensive because it must be adapted to the activity of restaurants, although there are specialists who are saying the contrary. The development of a network that should not block the traffic, a network with a password that is accessible from all corners is part of the conditions that help running such a project. It is also needed to avoid power outages by installing UPS-es, to have a performant equipment for the central nod of the network, finding the perfect spot for placing the tablet that will be used by the customer are other mandatory conditions that have to be solved before implementing such a project.

Among the advantages of implementing such a project we can mention: reducing costs with the hired personnel, decreasing the customers' waiting time, increasing the customers' satisfaction, optimising the stocks of goods, raw material and materials, accessibility, decreasing the costs of the business.

I consider that, any of these equipments can handle an application with the updated menu, with the value of the order and minimum information necessary for customers. One of these equipments is the tablet which can be put at the customers' disposition by

the restaurant. A problem would be finding a spot to place this so that customers could use it easily and could not deteriorate it in the time spent in the restaurant. Another problem would be the sanitation of the tablet after the customers leave so that the tablet does not break.

Another equipment would be the mobile phone (of the customer or of the restaurant) for which there should be a QR code which could allow the download of an application directly on it or, a website where the customer could directly download the application. There are applications for the mobile phones already implemented in order to be used by waiters so, they would not need very important modifications. In general, all the customers have a mobile phone so this could not be an obstacle in implementing the project. Only the network could be a problem here: it should be a performant one, it should not block when there are more customers who order at the same time. The problem of location would be gone and the customers' satisfaction would totally increase.

The restaurant manager plays an important role in applying one of the proposed solutions. If managers accept one of these solutions, they will solve the problem of personnel, regardless of the fact that they are unqualified, unsatisfied or incompetent and they generate customers unsatisfied with the offered services. However, the relationship between the IT specialist and the restaurant management must be a tight one in order to make the application adapted to the specific of their activity and to the more and more special requests of the customers.

The flow of receiving the customer-the customer's leaving, regardless of the used equipment should be according to figure 3, where the responsibilities are split between the employees and the customers of the restaurant.

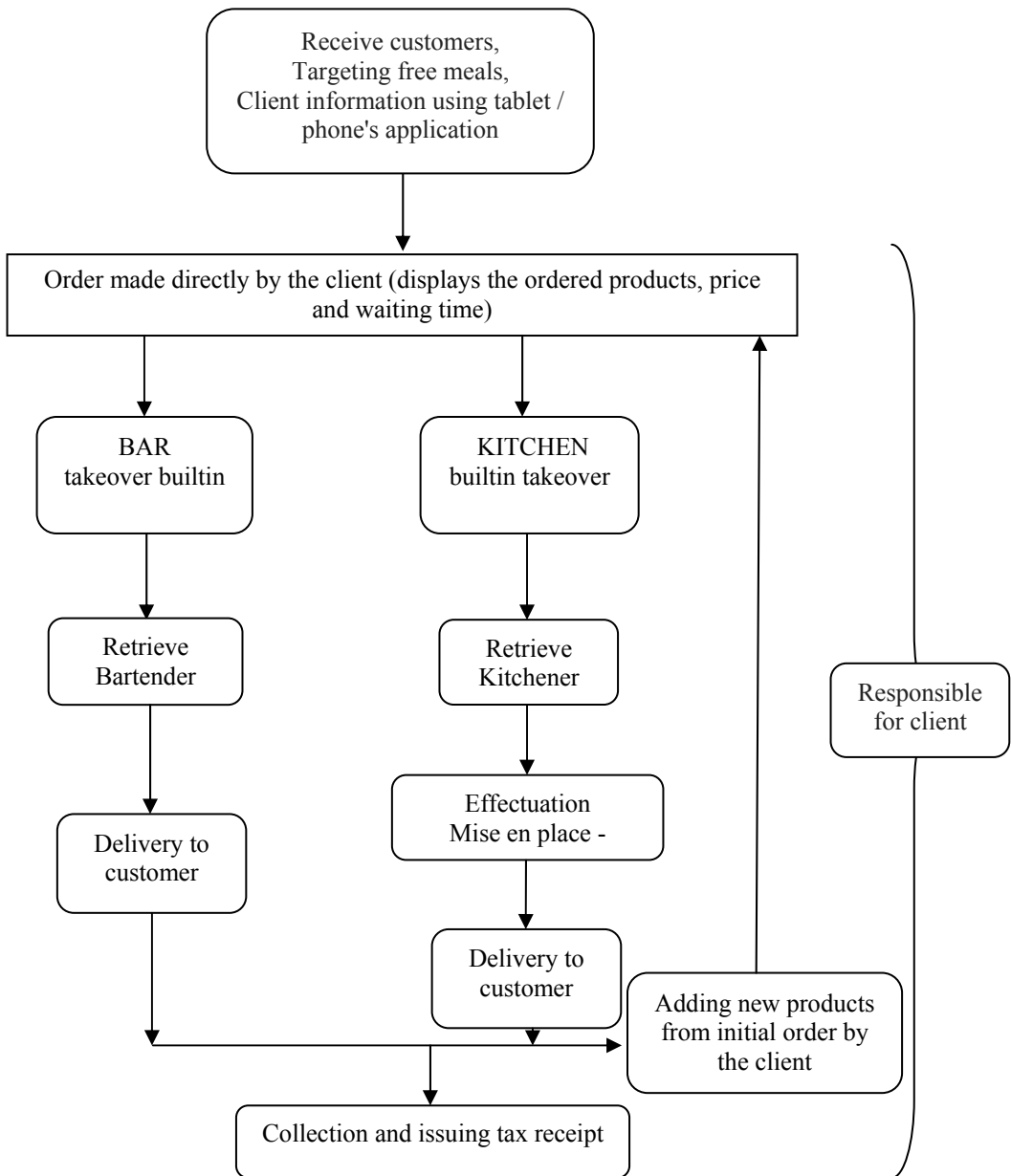


Figure 3. Flow of customer receiving-leaving, responsible for client

As shown in the research made up to now, IT solutions were already implemented in the restaurant management abroad. Thus, in the Applebee restaurant chain they have already been using tablets instead of waiters in Europe and Asia since 2013 and they want to develop this in the entire chain, USA included. The tablets are used by the customer for ordering appetizers, desserts or for having fun. In San Francisco (August, 2015) a completely automatic fast food restaurant was open. In the customers' sector, there is only one advisor for the customers who have problems in using the tablets or taking over orders. Fewer employees are used just because of the implementation of this IT system. Another chain of 823 restaurants i.e. Chilli uses tablets instead of waiters.

In Italy they have used tablets in the Il Marchesino restaurant (even since 2010) allowing customers to make their order a particular one if they are allergic to a specific ingredient of a product. The Elements restaurant from London offers customers the possibility to order by themselves from tablets. Tablets are put at the customers' disposition without any additional costs. The managers from these locations have understood that the investment will be paid off and this will bring only benefits on a long term.

In Romania they tried implementing such solutions at the end of 2012 although IT specialists came with solutions even from 2010 (Sedona). The Nargila Grill & Bar restaurant implemented such a solution. Unfortunately the managers of that period are no longer the employees of the place and I could not identify the limits or the reason for giving up on this system.

Due to the made research, I also noticed that, there is one more cost for the customers who go to such a restaurant, i.e. the use of tablets cost. In some situations the employees of the restaurant ask for the customers' ID until they leave the place (in order to avoid the stealing of the tablets).

As seen in the analysed forums the customers' opinions are different. Some of them consider tablets very useful and interesting if they have the menu of the restaurant and no extra costs are charged. They become useless in the customers' opinion when they have only internet for accessing some web pages or for having fun. The customers say that it should be forbidden to use mobiles in a restaurant so that you can socialise and have conversations with the people with whom you came. There are also opinions that the waiter should not disappear. Among the locations identified in Bucharest to use tablets (not with the complete solution proposed above), most of them are coffee shops (they offer some food, but very few) such as: Lollypop Café, White Café, Mon Amour, Mon Cher, Alys or the Nargila Bar & Grill restaurant. I did not identify a restaurant that uses mobile phones for the customers, but only for the waiters to take orders.

The managers of some restaurants whom I talked to (Nargila Bar & Grill, Ramayana Cafes, Piranha Club) are open to the IT solutions that are on the market. In the Piranha Club there are negotiations with an IT developer in order to introduce tablets for customers and to ease the waiters' activity because they lack personnel. In the Ramayana

Cafes they introduced a system in which customers let the waiters know if they want something else, asking for the bill inclusively and they are seriously considering to develop other IT solutions in the future.

In conclusion, regardless of the solution which managers implement, the new discoveries in the IT domain are for sure some support in their activity and not only. Diminishing the limits and exploiting the advantages of using the communication technologies must become the preoccupation of the implementation specialists.

3. Conclusion

The new communication and IT technologies are a solution for the business management in the restaurant domain. Managers are preoccupied to introduce them in the business that they are running, especially in the situation in which they face the problem of lack of personnel. The customers' satisfaction is a continuous preoccupation of the managers. For a company, a satisfied customer means the increase of the reputation of the restaurant and gain of profit.

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