BEVERAGE CONTROL SYSTEMS

A new look at an old problem

by Jeremy Rock

Any controller will tell you there is a constant struggle to maintain accurate beverage inventory counts. There are any number of reasons why the actual monthly inventory count could be off and identifying the exact reasons is difficult because of the areas of potential shrinkage. Some of the variance could be attributable to "over-pours" and heavy-handed bartenders. Spillage is another area of concern where the losses are difficult to track. In other instances a sophisticated bartender could be profiting on the side. Many controllers have adopted the view that if a bartender can stretch the system and still make their beverage cost match, then who cares – the operation was still profitable and everyone is happy in the end.

Advocates of liquor control systems such as Berg Company, Auper's and AZBar would beg to differ. They argue that if their systems are implemented they could add real dollars to a beverage department's bottom line. Liquor control systems have been around for some time. There is no question that these controlled pour systems have proven to be successful in the areas of accurately dispensing and controlling the portions of liquor that are dispensed.

However, there are some new wireless systems available that are designed for an open pour liquor operation. While these systems may not have all of the accurate dispensing features of a controlled pour system, they do have the ability to track the dispensing of liquor in real time. BarVision is one of the new wireless liquor management systems. Developed by a company called Nuvo Technologies, BarVision involves the use of a wireless tag that is attached to each bottle's pour spout.

BarVision's wireless liquor management system consists of three components: wireless tags, a radio receiver and the BarVision for Palm™ software. Here is how it works. The wireless tags contain tiny radio transmitters and are mounted to the top of open liquor bottles underneath the pour spout. They are low profile and don't interfere with a bartender's activities, including measured spouts. The receiver unit listens for radio frequency (RF) signals sent by wireless RF tags and converts and stores the signals as pour event messages. When connected to a Palm™ device, the receiver uploads the pour event messages to the software. The receivers can be powered either by an AC adapter or batteries. It is portable and can be placed in either indoor or outdoor locations which makes the system adaptable to most environments. The radio frequency transmitters can literally be deployed in seconds and are easy to conceal from public view. Should additional antennas be required, they can be mounted inconspicuously around the bar for optimal radio coverage and maximum range. Finally, the software captures the signals and information received from the wireless transmitters and translates the information into customizable sales, usage and exception reports. This information can then be displayed on the Palm device's screen, printed to a printer or exported for use with other desktop software. The software can also be configured dynamically to adjust the pricing of each drink.

Basically the software is configured so that each wireless tag is associated with a particular drink. The drinks are then priced by the pour amount which can be dynamically adjusted if necessary. In case you are wondering, the system does record every time the wireless RF tag is either removed or placed on a new bottle. If a bartender replaces a bottle during a shift, it will show up on his report.

The reporting for the system is also fairly robust providing management with a variety of reporting that can accurately measure the amount of liquor dispensed and the associated revenues generated. This can be compared against the POS reports for accuracy and consistency. Should there be a problem, it is fairly easy to identify.

While the traditional pour control systems still offer the best beverage controls, the

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Advantages

of a liquor control system

Portion Control – Controlling the pour portions provides for consistency and reduces the amount of spillage and over-pours.
Accountability – The system records ALL drinks and eliminates give-aways and potential theft.
Profitability – By controlling the pour costs, this leads to increased profitability associated with beverage costs.
Liability – By consistent tracking of a customer's alcohol consumption, it can be argued that a bartender is able to know when to "cut off" a customer who has had too much alcohol.

Disadvantages

of traditional pour systems

• They can be **expensive** to implement and maintain.
• They can be **cumbersome** to use and are not portable.
• Most systems **cannot be used with an open-pour** situation.

Wireless Advantages

Inexpensive to purchase and easy to implement.
Provides flexibility.
Real-time electronic control factors which would otherwise not be present.

Wireless Disadvantages

• A lack of controlled pours
• Mixed drinks – while the system can take accurate measurements of the alcohol dispensed, it is difficult to track where the drinks should be allocated. However, if the pricing of the drinks is consistent, the system should balance out at the end of the day.

new wireless liquor management systems enable bartenders to free-pour while maintaining full liquor management accountability and inventory control. As such, they provide a great alternative to hospitality establishments who are looking for a cost-effective solution that is flexible and can accommodate an open-pour operation.

It should be noted that no system is full-proof. While the use of inventory control systems is greatly encouraged, taking regular physical inventories and tracking receiving and empties is still encouraged. Simply relying on your POS system or pouring control system will not take the place of regular and thorough physical inventories.

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