

and they must be certain that their system does not interfere with the hotel's and that it is not vulnerable to intrusion by users on the hotel's system.

REQUISITIONING

Large hotel properties with central warehouses should allow requisitions only via electronic media. These requisitions can be generated automatically when on-hand stock falls below par levels or they can, of course, also be prepared manually, such as for a chef's daily order sheet. Paperless transmission has really sped up the approval process, and approval itself is often given faster since supporting documents (e.g., copies of the vendor bids, or photos of the items being ordered) can easily be attached. Consolidation of items from multiple approved requisitions into the various vendor orders is also simpler, and shipping instructions can specify which items are to be delivered bundled together for delivery to a single location.

Again, smaller operations without warehouses do not need this capability. Issues of food and beverage are made either by the kitchen manager or the manager on duty. Security concerns in these establishments are addressed in the old fashioned way, by limiting physical access to the food and beverages.

PHYSICAL INVENTORY COUNTS

All systems can print traditional inventory count sheets for the storekeepers to mark with the on-hand quantity of each item in its various pack sizes. However, the process is slow and tedious, as well as prone to transcription errors when the counts are entered into the I/P system later. As a result, hand-held bar code scanners are increasingly used, bringing improvements in speed and accuracy through precise product identification and automatic data upload into the I/P system. Items without bar codes on their own packaging can have adhesive or hanging labels printed for them by the I/P system during the receiving process. These bar code scanners are used when items are requisitioned from the warehouse by the individual outlets to remove items from the warehouse's inventory and add them to the outlet's.

This capability allows I/P systems to track the expected shelf life of fresh produce items, poultry, and other highly perishable products to ensure that stock is rotated or disposed of before it deteriorates. It's obviously important to monitor usage carefully to set proper on-hand quantities; too little and you lose sales, too much and it spoils. Chefs have always had to do this, of course; what's different now is the inclusion of item shelf life in an inventory system for a more structured recording and analysis approach.

For larger operations that can track physical inventory through warehouse controls, monthly physical inventory counts are becoming less common, at least in the United States, and more properties now use cycle counts. A