

In order to address these concerns major credit card companies created an organization—the Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council¹ (commonly known as PCI)—to ensure that any business accepting credit cards adhered to a strict set of standards for IS security. Failure to adhere to these standards is very risky for business, in terms of liability for fines, card replacement costs and most importantly, loss of customer goodwill. The overwhelming majority of restaurants in operation today are not PCI compliant.

The PCI standards require that all merchants build and maintain a secure network, take steps to encrypt and protect cardholder data, maintain a vulnerability management program, implement strong access control measures, regularly monitor and test their networks, and maintain an information security policy. Measuring a restaurant's compliance with PCI standards is also a useful measure of how well the business is guarding data other than credit card information. The same six standards should be adhered to when assessing the security of proprietary data, as the damage that could be done to a business by a breach of its other IS systems is potentially as great as if credit card data are compromised. In other words, a breach could cost you your business.

Wireless networks, in particular, are extremely vulnerable. To protect them requires more than the simple use of passwords, virus scans, or a firewall if any sensitive data are being transmitted via the network. The best systems for protecting wireless data transmissions are those that utilize a strong form of the extensible authentication protocol (EAP). EAP supports a number of different authentication schemes and can fulfill the relevant requirements for PCI compliance.

CONCLUSION

F&B management isn't going to get any simpler or easier. It's always going to rely on creative people to set the atmosphere, and on people-focused managers to provide excellent guest service and to keep a motivated, guest-focused staff happy and productive, in a world with slim margins and traditionally high employee turnover.

The industry has reached the point where the use of information systems is a necessity, and that these systems must be integrated to provide management with the tools necessary to compete effectively in a drastically constricted economy. The slim profit margins by which restaurants normally operate have become razor thin. It is absolutely essential that information systems be utilized effectively to create as much value as possible. Like all the best tools, they become intuitive and invisible to their most practiced users, and creative managers will take full advantage of them to maximize both guest satisfaction and profits.

1 See the AH&LA publication "The PCI Compliance Planning Process for Lodging Establishments"