

As seen in the Sunday Plus section of the *Winnipeg Sun*  
(Circulation: 43,770)



C22 WINNIPEG SUN ■ SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 19 2004

## TECHNOLOGY

# Palms grease waitering gig

## Servers find handhelds ideal for taking orders

ANGELA PACIENZA  
Canadian Press

TORONTO — Waitress Rachel Ng has a new weapon against the lunch rush.

The weight of a pack of cigarettes, only thinner so it cradles perfectly in her palm, the handheld PC is becoming a digital replacement to the traditional pen-and-paper method of serving tables. And since it works with wireless technology, the kitchen gets the order seconds after the customer has made the request.

But does restaurant gadgetry equal better service for hungry patrons? Ng says absolutely.

### Fewer order errors

"You have more time to chat with the customer because you're not worried about running to punch in the next order," said Ng, 27, who works at Spring Rolls, a bustling pan-Asian restaurant across the street from the Eaton Centre in the heart of downtown Toronto. "They think (the units) are really cool."

Other advantages, she adds, are fewer order errors and more detailed food allergy notes for cooks.

After taking an order on the Write-On Handheld point-of-sale system, Ng can move to another table rather than run to the kitchen or a computer terminal at the other end of the restaurant. By the time she takes the fourth table's order, plates are being served by "runners" to her first customers, she says.

That's because the instant an item is entered into the handheld, the food order appears on a screen in the kitchen. Using a stylus, the device combines touch-screen and handwriting recognition.

Hospitality experts say the gadgets, popping up in restaurants in North American and Europe, are a welcome addition at busy restaurants and pubs because they streamline work in chaotic environments.



J.P. MOCZULSKI CP

**Rachael Ng (holding palm) takes an order which is then directly routed to the kitchen.**

"It's very practical," said Gabor Forgacs, assistant director at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Ryerson University in Toronto.

"It speeds up the whole process of taking an order and getting the order to the production area. It also eliminates miscommunication opportunities."

How many times have you been at a restaurant and had the wrong food item brought to you? Or the server forgot to mention "no tomatoes" on your salad? Have you ever ordered a special of the day only to have the server return five or 10 minutes later to say the kitchen just ran out?

Those behind the technology rave it will change the restaurant experience because it expedites the kitchen-to-table process and eliminates errors when the information is being relayed to either the kitchen or central computer system.