



# Foodservice Technology SOLUTIONS

## Innovations!

by Mike Tash

On August 13th, 2009 a musical icon and innovator, guitarist Les Paul, died. He was 94. If it wasn't for him the electric guitar would be very different, multi-track recording technology may have never progressed and sound effects such as electronic echos may have never been created. After hearing of his death it made me think of all the technology innovations that are just moving into everyday life. One of them being the growing participation in social networks.

Social networks are here to stay! Sites like Facebook and Twitter are a new and effective way to communicate. As an example I heard about Les Paul via Twitter before it was on any of the major news sites or TV stations. If you have not looked into any of the social networking sites perhaps it is a good time for you to take a look.



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With Facebook you set up a profile and invite "friends" to join your network. Once you join, the next step is to create a profile for your restaurant. On the profile you can post pictures, menus, events and your friends will see the update almost real-

time when you post it. A great feature of Facebook is the Groups feature. You can create a group called "Friends of My Food" (Whatever you want to call it) which would be a public group – this means anyone can join. Now you have a place for fans of your restaurant to meet and talk about what they (and sometimes what they don't like) about your restaurant. It's a great tool for real-time promotions, feedback and to follow up.



Twitter is a network that asks the question "What are you doing?" and you have 140 characters to answer that question. Twitter gives you a fragmented experience of opinions, events, news, ideas and feedback largely because it is structured to accommodate non-contextual conversations: You can easily follow thousands of users and listen in and enter into conversations conducted among multiple users at any point.

On the other hand, Twitter can be actively used as a tool to push out messages that capitalize on the attention you're receiving from other users. Yes, I'm talking about self-promotion and marketing. This involves active engagement!

The network is similar to Facebook in the sense that you have to set up a profile but where it's different is that on Twitter people sign on to follow you.

There are some great uses of Twitter in our industry. Here are just a few examples:

1. **Branding.** Twitter has the primary benefit of developing a casual persona and establishes you as a social personality that is connected and approachable. As Twitter adoption increases, new users will be drawn towards well established Twitter personas

2. **Get Feedback.** Need an alternative perspective on how a special went, how the Friday night band was or what type of wine goes with the surf and turf? Blast out a message asking for advice and you'll receive replies from other users. This collective intelligence can be used as fodder for other specials and events

3. **Event Updates.** You can use Twitter as a means to keep your followers in the loop with all of your special events. This is a hassle-free way of disseminating information, especially when you don't have the means to set up a direct link between you and your customers

4. **Provide live coverage.** Twitter's message size limit prevents detailed coverage of events but it can allow you to provide real-time commentary which may help to spark further discussion or interest on the event as other Twitter users spread the message. Very useful for citizen journalism.

This list is just a few very basic ideas for using these sites. The only limit is your creativity. Keep in mind – if you enter the world of social networking, you need to make the commitment to be active and keep it up to date. You can and will lose followers just as quickly as you gain them by not being involved in the network – that's why it's called social! Both of these networks are free to join. Once you do make the leap into the social networking world, don't forget to update your Web site with the Facebook and Twitter link so your customers will know where to find you!



Michael Tash is Vice President of Customer Relations at ESS. With over 20 years of restaurant experience, ESS helps you use your technology to be more efficient and more profitable. Michael can be reached at 301-944-2223 or Michael.tash@esspos.com. If you're really curious how this works, you can find my Twitter at [www.twitter.com/badisblues](http://www.twitter.com/badisblues)



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