Take a bite of your restaurant’s big data
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About the author
Glenn Miller is the owner and Managing Director of Pilot Software – one of South Africa’s leading Point of Sale (PoS) companies. With more than 16 years’ experience in the restaurant industry, Glenn Miller is not only an expert in the field, he is also well aware of the many benefits an effective intuitive system can offer establishments of any type or size.

As an owner of many restaurants, he knows first-hand the challenges facing the industry and continually drives Pilot’s
development to address, simplify or overcome these challenges. Glenn has aligned his passion for simplification and optimisation through the power of technology with his team’s vision. This has resulted in the most comprehensive and sophisticated PoS solutions.

Pilot is a South African, future-facing PoS solutions provider with clients worldwide. It is the supplier of choice to many of the country’s leading, independent franchise restaurant brands and has helped these clients to achieve continued success. The Pilot team is aware that its own prosperity is driven by the growth and stability of its clients and proven third-party integration partnerships. This is a winning recipe to help ensure longevity in the marketplace.
Think big data
Big data encompasses extremely large data sets that can be analysed to reveal patterns and trends, especially about human behaviour. Leveraging data is not only for the likes of Amazon and Google. Any industry can use big data to better tailor its client offering. Big data should be used as a strategic approach to customising a restaurant to suit its guests, not only by advertising, but the integration of menu offerings through to server behaviour.

Restaurants need to gain more insights into why customers are refusing to return to their outlet or prefer one dish over another. Restaurants encompass a sum of endless choices and big data helps restaurants make sense of it. Today’s software is designed to help restaurants unlock the secrets of their data. Data from your PoS, marketing, accounting, inventory and scheduling systems yield a treasure trove of data. With innovative technology at your fingertips, your establishments can benefit from predictive analytics just like any other tech giant.
Take a bite of the big data pie
Think of the data you already possess, from transactions to customer information such as birthdays and email addresses.

Are you processing and essentially translating that knowledge into improved decision-making and performance? For data to make a considerable impact on your bottom line, there must be a clear business direction for its use including what to look out for and the skills or resources needed to achieve it.

Data can be structured (given data) or unstructured (email or social media posts, customer references). You need to keep track of and merge both sets of data as far as possible. In a restaurant, data flows may be highly inconsistent because of periodic peaks. Social media may also trend. Daily, seasonal or event-triggered peak data loads can be a challenge to manage. Think about the busy times in your restaurant and how data will flow from multiple sources. It’s a challenge to link, match, clean up and transform data across systems, but it’s necessary to connect and correlate relationships, hierarchies and multiple data linkages or your data can soon spiral out of control.

The aim of collecting data is to better predict the changing desires, behaviours,
and trends of your patrons. This data can drive menu changes, service, delivery changes or new location opportunities. US restaurant company, The Cheesecake Factory, uses big data applications to combine data from its hundreds of locations to deliver a better dining experience. If a customer complained about bad-tasting ketchup in a location in California and another customer made the same complaint in Boston, it tracks the exact batch of ketchup that might have gone bad and alert locations that are using it to switch to a new batch.
Big data can improve your restaurant operations
There are many data points in a restaurant. Your restaurant is a complex, multi-faceted operation that produces an incredibly rich array of data.

Think about food, beverage and labour costs, customer interactions, social media, your staffing schedule, table turnover and customer promotions. There’s a ton of information there that’s just waiting to be analysed.

**TO MAKE THE BEST OF THIS INFORMATION YOU NEED:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURED DATA</th>
<th>UNSTRUCTURED DATA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PoS:</strong> A Point of Sale system picks up multiple bits of information from various sources in your restaurant. From tracking sales and inventory, collecting customer data to managing staff scheduling.</td>
<td><strong>Social media:</strong> Engagements occurred such as likes, retweets, shares and comments.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Suppliers:</strong> Product availability and prices.</td>
<td><strong>Weather and traffic patterns:</strong> For instance, some restaurants at Pretoria’s Menlyn Maine use set menus when there’s a show at the Sun Arena at Time Square to accommodate the increase in foot traffic.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accounting:</strong> Costs, revenue and margins.</td>
<td><strong>Customer profiles:</strong> Names, email addresses and customer preferences.</td>
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It’s important to accumulate information from structured and unstructured data to gain a more holistic view of your customers. The big question is, how do you gather this information? Waiters technically gather most of the information, but a PoS system is needed to give them a place to keep it. Not only that, everything runs through this system. And it’s the same system that breaks down sales by time, size of the party, menu items and even ingredients.

For instance, data drawn from the kitchen or your suppliers will determine how you manage recipes and inventory, which will lead to better cost control and quality and will ensure consistency. Best of all, restaurant owners can view data centrally, from a number of outlets, even from their mobile device. So restaurant owners can keep an eye on their business operations from anywhere.
Importance of data security
Since you have so much data on hand, it can be tempting for others to use it for malicious intent.

Protecting your database against outsiders is just as important as protecting it from insiders. Ensuring that you maintain a hardened firewall and robust virus protection software is your best bet against an intruder wanting to gain access to your precious data. It’s also important to keep your PoS system updated regularly.

Pilot Point of Sale solutions gives you and your customers peace of mind by offering a sophisticated data management system. Our use of a secure, encrypted access MS-SQL database and our partnership with IronTree ensures that all your valuable restaurant data is protected and safely stored off-site in IronTree’s server farm.
How Pilot can help sort out your data
Our **PilotLive business intelligence solution** optimises information-gathering and correlates financial and operational data to help your establishment run more efficiently.

PilotLive can assist any restaurant owner or franchise manager with an overall view of their restaurant or group. By offering real-time data – from a central cloud-based location – you can keep track of all transactions, staff movements and stock purchases, and generate meaningful reports to help improve business processes. PilotLive gives owners a comprehensive overview of data to increase profits and reduce wastage. It also supplies a comparative analysis of multiple outlets.

Our PilotLive mobile app further increases the power of intuitive analytics by giving you ultimate control from any smart device, anytime and from anywhere. Check all restaurant data while travelling between outlets or during your time off. The PilotLive app offers live turnover, discounts, voids, purchases and cash payouts, live staff time tracking, and call logging directly into Pilot support.

Pilot has 27 years’ experience in the Point of Sale industry, and we continue to innovate our product to help our clients improve and grow their businesses. Pilot is an industry leader in providing an all-encompassing offering to our customers. Pilot PoS can optimise virtually all aspects of your establishment.

For more information on Pilot Software and our wide range of solutions that are tailored to the restaurant industry, visit our [website](#) or click here to arrange a demonstration.