8 POINTS to consider when buying retail Point of Sale
Digital technology has transformed the world and people’s expectations when it comes to many industries, including retail. Many retailers are, however, behind the curve, using technology that cannot deliver the seamless omni-channel experiences today’s consumers expect. The systems put in place a decade ago simply were not architected to support the way retail works today, and as customers increasingly demand more convenient and personalized service that flows across all the channels they use, retailers that can’t deliver will fall ever further behind their competitors.

For those working with older Point of Sale (POS) systems, allowing customers to shop the way they want can entail many manual processes, requiring a large number of staff and incurring high expenses. But for every retailer that fails to deliver the experience customers want, there are many competitors that do.

Retailers looking to replace their old POS systems have a unique opportunity to make sure they choose a system with the right features, one that can bring together the information, processes and knowledge that sales associates need to deliver a truly personalized experience. Making the right choices is essential to success.

What should retailers look at to identify the POS system that can help them achieve their business goals in the digital age?

1. **Think of the customer journey**
2. **Mobile is a must-have**
3. **POS must get personal**
4. **Upselling and cross-selling**
5. **Offers matter**
6. **Your POS should suit your people**
7. **Expand your payment horizons**
8. **Look at where you want to be**
Think of the customer journey

One of the first things to consider when buying retail POS is: **how can it support the way your customers want to shop, now and in the future?**

Retail has changed a lot over the last decade or so. Today’s shoppers are highly self-sufficient. Transactions start in one place and flow through to another as people research their purchases, from smartphone apps to websites to their local store and back again. These customers make their purchases wherever and whenever they feel inspired to buy, and then have their items delivered or pick them up at the most convenient location. In this connected environment, success is built on a seamless and personalized customer experience, and the POS plays a critical role in delivering that.

POS should give sales associates all the tools they need to deliver the experience that will entice customers to buy. That means making everything from sales and returns processes to stock transfers, inventory data, promotions, product information, customer preferences, past purchases and interactions **available in one place** – so staff can conduct a seamless conversation with the customer, whichever channels they have been using.

The key is to **think about the consumer’s path to purchase and envisage how the POS can make it easier and more personal**. For example, when somebody places an order online, the POS can alert staff in the store that there’s an order to pick, generate an automated message once the pick is confirmed to tell the customer their order is ready for collection, and then make it simple to complete the transaction quickly when they come in to collect their goods.

Channeling everything through the POS in this way doesn’t only simplify the customer’s journey; it also simplifies the process of serving them, enabling associates to **work more efficiently** without the need for special training on multiple systems.
Mobile is a must-have

Mobile is no longer a ‘nice to have’ element in retail; it is central to the experience customers expect and has become increasingly important to the strategies of successful retailers. According to Forrester, mobile has become an essential part of the customer’s path to purchase: mobile phones influenced more than $1 trillion in consumer spend in 2016, and that number is only going to grow in the future. But the mobile experience shouldn’t depend solely on the device in the customer’s hand. Shoppers expect the retailers they buy from to embrace mobile in the same way they do.

Mobile POS (mPOS) empowers sales associates to serve customers where they stand – for example, in front of the product they’re interested in buying. It can drastically reduce any queues, speed up service and deliver a much more convenient experience for shoppers. The key is to make sure your mPOS can do everything you would expect from your stationary POS – including payments, promotions, product knowledge and up-to-date information on inventory, offers and customer activity.

To do that, mobile and stationary POS need to work seamlessly together so that wherever sales associates look, they know they have accurate, up-to-the-minute information. Finding a POS solution that also includes the option of running on mobile devices is the best way to achieve that seamless connectivity.
However they choose to shop, customers require a **personal shopping experience**. They may engage in a vast web of interactions across different channels, but they expect that any sales associate they speak to will know all about their past purchases, needs and preferences. However, acquiring this level of knowledge about each customer can be a challenge for the most dedicated professional, let alone for the many retail associates who work part-time.

The POS is the key to empowering those workers with fast, easy and intuitive access to **all the information they need about the customer** – such as past purchases, loyalty points balance and any information about their interests – in one place. This is the information that enables a personal greeting to a regular customer, even if that particular staff member hasn’t served them before. It allows associates to deliver tangible value to the customer through recommendations and special offers that are based on their personal interests.
Knowledge about the customer enables a personalized experience, but to really boost selling power that information should be combined with knowledge about related products, services and promotions. If the POS system includes a powerful search engine that draws on data from multiple sources, staff can easily find answers to customers’ questions, whether they want to know the dimensions of a product or how many are left in stock. Combining this with automatic reminders about related items or details of available discounts and offers enables staff to cross-sell and upsell while maximising the value of the transaction for the business and the customer.

It’s not just a matter of whether the POS can enable upselling and cross-selling opportunities; an increasingly important question is how it does that. Suggestive selling through the POS can be a great way to boost sales but it needs to flow naturally, like a conversation, if it’s really going to help personalise and enhance the customer experience.

Automated machine learning can take suggestive selling to the next level, enabling the POS to provide suggestions that are more tailored to the customer’s shopping habits. As well as relevant products and offers, some retailers are using these technologies to include suggestions based on the purchases of other customers with similar interests. With this increasingly sophisticated information available through the POS, staff can have an informed conversation with the customer and give recommendations that truly enhance the shopping experience.
In the omni-channel world, customers shop around. They have unbounded choice when it comes to making their purchase, and many will base that choice on the incentives they are offered. If the offers aren’t relevant to the customer, or if the process of redeeming vouchers and loyalty points is cumbersome, they will quickly move on to a competitor who offers a more rewarding experience.

The POS can go a long way to ensuring success in this area by providing fast and easy access to all the relevant information and processes in a way that doesn’t slow down the customer journey. Being able to manage offers, promotions and discounts at the POS makes it easy to respond to customer trends quickly with new offers. When associates can set up new customer accounts, access activities relevant to the loyalty program and see all applicable offers at the POS, they can deliver a smooth, personalized and rewarding shopping experience.
Your POS should suit your people

In order to streamline service, the POS needs to make it easy for every member of the team to do their job. That begins with **role-based support** so associates can quickly log into menus designed for them. Being able to **control who has access to what** – for example assigning different discounts to different staff members, or ensuring that only supervisors can handle returns and voids – puts the manager in charge of operations while making sure staff have the tools and flexibility they need.

In addition, the tools and information need to **flow in a way that complements the way the business works**. Changes will need to be made every now and then, and it's both costly and time-consuming to have to ask IT to help every time you want to alter the POS menu. The value of being able to **change the look of the POS screen**, add and remove buttons, provide smart menus and create shortcuts quickly and easily cannot be underestimated. If you can customize the POS to fit not only the needs of the business, but also the needs of individual users or groups of users, you can provide a smooth path for sales and service with no distractions or complications that can cause mistakes and waste valuable time.

**POS** that is customizable in this way – with any changes instantly reflected in both stationary and mobile POS – can simplify key tasks for sales associates and streamline the service they deliver. This also makes it easy for new staff to learn the system, helping to **minimize training needs** and the cost that comes with them.
Expand your payment horizons

Customers want to use many different types of payment, even in the same transaction. They might want to use cash, smart cards, gift cards, discount vouchers, digital codes, loyalty points, foreign currency, mobile payment technologies – or any combination of these. Some will want to split their payment, for example if their basket contains items they are buying for somebody else.

Allowing customers to pay how they want is a critical factor in customer satisfaction. No potential customer wants to reach the end of their shopping journey and be told by the retailer that they cannot accept their payment – and no retail business wants to lose that sale. It’s just as important that however the customer wants to pay, they can do it quickly and with minimal fuss.

It’s not simply a case of accepting different types of payment – it’s important to make the process simple for staff so you can minimize the risk of mistakes. In the case of combined payment methods, a POS that does all the relevant calculations can significantly speed up service, as sales associates don’t need to work out how much is left to pay.

Support for foreign currencies is also important, especially for retailers located close to borders, on ships, or in highly touristic locations. Many retailers are now choosing POS that makes it easy for them to add the currencies they choose to accept, and which can automatically calculate the price and amount of change due in any currency used.
Ten years ago, the POS would have been one among many separate components retailers put in place for different aspects of their business. Over the years, maintaining integrations between the POS and other systems such as inventory, sales audit and accounting has become a challenge that ends up eating up a large proportion of the IT budget. As a result, many IT managers are now looking for POS that are part of a wider retail system, often choosing to host it offsite.

Whether you’re looking to buy POS as a standalone application or as part of a larger system which includes an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution, the system needs to integrate smoothly with the other components, so it can give everyone access to consistent, up-to-date information on everything from financial data to stock levels and locations. However, not all the POS systems available today are capable of achieving that.

When choosing a new POS solution for your retail business, it’s important to look ahead. Ask whether it will easily integrate with your existing system, and how easily it will work with any systems you might install in the future. Is it supported by trusted technologies with ongoing R&D investment, and does the vendor have the industry expertise to deliver a system that will support your business goals? The retail POS you buy today is a commitment to the customers of tomorrow – and answering these questions will help you identify the system that can deliver the experience those customers expect.
Buying a new retail POS can involve complex questions about the current state of the enterprise and how the POS, as part of the overall IT strategy, can help it achieve its business goals in the future. Customers’ expectations of a seamless, personalized, omni-channel shopping experience mean that POS can no longer stand alone at the cash desk. As well as connecting sales associates with consumers through different channels, it needs to integrate with back-office applications to provide fast, accurate information for planning, decision-making and streamlined customer service. Achieving that flexibility enables a unique shopping experience with the customer at the center, wherever they are and whatever channels they use during their shopping journey.

The issues highlighted in this paper provide some key points to consider when selecting retail POS. By focusing on the matters discussed above, in addition to specific business needs, retail managers can identify the POS system that will enable them to deliver a unique shopping experience, now and in the future.
Bring your business to the next level

Selecting the right POS system for your retail chain can be a daunting task. A system with too many options might slow down your service and training times; on the other hand, a POS with too few options might not give you the ability to offer your customers the omni-channel service they expect.

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