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The Evolving Check-Out Lane

Mobile Point of Sale capabilities are helping to reshape
the checkout experience.



By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer,
Retail Customer Experience

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Ever since saloon owner James Ritty invented the cash register in 1879 in an effort to stop his employees from pocketing his profits, checking out a customer's purchases has followed the same basic model.

Whether the checkout is in the front of the store, in the back or off to the side it is the last stop before the shopper heads out of the store. Larger format stores and hyper markets may have strategically placed registers in specific departments like jewelry, customer service, sporting goods, hardware, etc depending on store layout.

And in nearly all cases, the checkout lane is set up for the convenience of the retailer rather than the customer. In addition to serving as a storage facility for bags, scissors, paperwork and employee drinks, they function—at least in the minds of many retailers—as the final destination on a shopper's journey throughout the store.

But that's changing.



A new channel

Although the concept of a checkout lane has remained largely intact over the years, even as cash registers have evolved from Ritty's Incorruptible Cashier to today's networked point-of-sale systems, they're beginning to show their age. Shoppers are demanding a better in store experience, and those lanes just aren't doing the job.

According to a 2015 study conducted online by Harris Poll and commissioned by image technology company Digimarc, an overwhelming majority of Americans—88 percent— want their store checkout experience to be faster. A combined 50 percent of respondents named slow checkout speeds and long lines as their top grievances.

“Checkout is the last opportunity a retailer has to make a positive impression on a shopper,” said Digimarc Chief Marketing Officer Larry Logan when the poll results were released. “Asking customers to endure a lengthy wait to process and pay for their order can spoil what may have otherwise been an enjoyable shopping experience.”

Other disappointing features about the checkout process is a lack of quality human interaction and perceived gratitude. A majority of respondents to the Harris poll—61 percent—felt that clerks focused more on scanning items and less on finding out if they're satisfied.

With the addition of new technology, retailers now have an opportunity to address those customer concerns, reshape the checkout experience and increase same store sales in the process.

One of those channels is maximizing the mobility of a tablet. With the right solution, a tablet can be attached to a stand as a front counter POS solution or as a kiosk for

customers to fill out surveys, sign up for and access loyalty programs, fill out credit applications and look up items in the store catalogue. When connected to an enterprise database, the kiosk can be used to see if items are in stock at a nearby location or to be delivered to the shopper's home. Combining a tablet with a Payment Device, a tablet can be used to convert a typical "endless aisle" function, to a transaction allowing the customer to order and pay for items without the process of going to stand in line.

"Retail space is valuable and is limited preventing store owners from having every size and every color on the shelf. A tablet based kiosk solution that supports endless aisle type applications and the ability to enable a business's omnichannel fulfilment goals is critical to a business's profitability" said Jim Sankey, CEO of Charlotte, N.C.-based InVue, a global provider of innovative sales enablement and security solutions for retailers and commercial retail businesses.

"Using a tablet as a mobile, interactive sales tool prevents that customer from leaving and going to your competition, or worse yet, using their phone while in your store to buy the same product on a competitor's website."

Improving the experience

As retailers seek ways to remain relevant in an era of e-commerce and mobile commerce, one of the ways they can differentiate themselves is via the customer experience. Econsultancy's 2017 Digital Trends Report, published in association with Adobe, calls this the "experience economy."

Customer experience is regarded as the primary way for organizations to differentiate themselves from competitors, the report said. Respondents to a survey for the report overwhelmingly said customer experience was their most exciting opportunity.

Although tablet kiosks are helping to reshape the customer experience, their true value doesn't come from them serving as a stationary device. Instead, that value is enhanced dramatically by the ability to remove tablets from their mounts and use them as an assisted selling tool.



“Adding the mobile capability to the in store technology takes an interactive customer experience to an interpersonal customer experience which will increase the number of in store transactions,” Sankey said.

InVue’s products include its CT300 tablet solution, which features 3-axis viewing, optional mobile POS device integration and USB 2.0 ports for the addition of peripherals such as card readers and scan guns. Auditing and unlimited mobility are possible with software control and rapid tablet undocking technology. The CT300’s stand provides power and security to integrated tablets and mobile POS devices, accommodating 8” to 13” tablets.



What retailers should consider before tablet deployment

Once the decision has been made to proceed with a tablet, there are a number of factors to consider that can impact success.

Tablet choice

Which tablet is right for your application? Retailers should think practically about the type of tablet needed. If associates will be holding them, think about how heavy the tablet is along with the use case, card reader and any other accessories that will be needed. Differences in screen size, battery life etc. should be considered carefully.

Integrated Charging Capability

Ensuring the tablet and payment device is always charged and at the ready is most important. If the tablet requires a secondary action to charge and a third to charge the payment device, there are two things that typically happen, (1) they do not get plugged in and are not charged when needed and (2) the process is cumbersome and therefore the staff do not use the technology.

Flexibility

Choose a solution that will support any operating system (iOS, Windows, Android) and multiple size tablets (8”, 10”, 12” ...etc). One thing we know for sure is tablets will change over time. Have a tablet kiosk and point of sale solution that can support multiple brands, operating systems and sizes and can grow as you add technology to your environment.

Mobility / Portability

Always consider the ease of undocking the tablet from your kiosk for quick access. Whether you are mobile 85% of the day or only 15% of the day, the tablet needs to be accessible quickly and easily and docked just as well so the interaction with the technology is seamless to the customer. If the process is clumsy the associate nor the customer get the value.

Security

Consider that the technology may need to be left unattended. Choose an enclosure that secures the device to deter would be thieves. Tablets are targets and you cannot be watching them at all times. A secure solution eliminates the need for nightly lock up or secondary storage which improves the likelihood the tablet is always in a position to be used, not in a drawer being stored.

Source: InVue

“Mobility enables customer interactive applications to become technical sales tools,” Sankey said. “These tools enable store associates to build value around the product, your store brand and provide an improved customer experience driving increased profitability around each sale.”

This allows the associate to capture the sale at the point of decision for the customer. There is no opportunity to abandon the cart while waiting in line and causing you to lose the sale. All this while improving the customer experience which gets them to want to come back.

Beyond the walls

Along with creating new opportunities and new ways of interacting with customers inside the store, the mobility features of a tablet kiosk solution offer new opportunities outside the store as well.

Mobile applications enable the experience to happen inside or outside a store or restaurant. Enabling payment devices to be mobile with a tablet, the sales tool can be table side, pool side or at a remote special event. This enables the same secure payment you have in the store to go mobile. You are improving the customer experience with the security you expect around payments as well as expanding the use of your loyalty programs.

“The ability to participate in those events to enable that customer experience is an important part of remaining competitive,” Skip Hinshaw, Vice President of Commercial said. “I’ve now gone from a brick-and-mortar location to a situation where I can literally carry my store around with me in my hand.”

About the sponsor:

Headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., InVue provides global retailers and commercial businesses with innovative sales enablement solutions. InVue products balance the need for excellent sales and customer service with best-in-class security requirements and store aesthetics. From helping retailers secure and display high-theft merchandise to leveraging tablets for commercial business use, and partnering with OEM brands to securely display their merchandise, InVue solutions provide an exceptional value to our retail, business and brand customers.