



The road less travelled: preparing for tomorrow's challenges, today

In a sector that never stands still, many retailers find their in-store technology falls behind consumer demands almost as soon as it's deployed. So how can businesses implement a point of sale solution that meets future shopper needs, even if their challenges are not yet known? BCP's Richard Marshall outlines why the cloud holds the key.

Interestingly, a recent [Which? survey](#) into customer satisfaction on the High Street revealed a shift away from multiples towards independent stores. One of the main reasons behind this is the personalised service on offer, as the technology major brands have implemented to improve experiences – such as self-service checkouts – are frustrating, rather than attracting, shoppers.

This example is indicative of a wider dilemma the retail industry faces. Consumers crave tailored experiences but, the larger you grow, the more difficult this is to attain through customer service alone. Therefore, investing in point of sale (POS) technology becomes the most viable route to extending convenience and flexibility across the store network.

However, shoppers are prone to changing their behaviour patterns – and operational infrastructures change as businesses expand – which can lead to a situation in which retailers commit to a technology that quickly fails to meet their requirements.

To make this challenge even greater, it's impossible to predict just how the industry will change. So how do retail organisations find a point of sale solution that can cope with as-yet-unknown demands?

There is always going to be leaner, faster, more comprehensive hardware being released to the market, so retailers have to accept that upgrading POS equipment is a necessity for innovation. However, the ability to change and add devices can differ dramatically depending on the software system that sits behind it.

Agility is the key to technology investment in today's rapidly changing retail environment – building an IT infrastructure that can easily evolve as companies grow. And it's the cloud that can enable such dexterity.

Moving electronic point of sale (EPOS) over to a cloud-based system essentially frees retailers from the shackles of bulky on-site support to a centralised remote network, capable of sharing data across the business. With the cloud, retailers are immediately in a position where every store terminal can draw on detailed insights and functionalities, to better serve customer needs.

For example, through the cloud, POS can be integrated with inventory information, to reveal at the touch of a button whether an item missing from the shelf is available out back – or in a



neighbouring store. If it's the latter, sales staff can order the item for store collection or home delivery from their POS device, depending on the customer's preference.

In addition to enhancing customer service capabilities, a cloud-based solution significantly improves network maintenance and upgrade capabilities. With traditional POS technology, if there's a technical issue, on-site support may be required to rectify the problem. This can result in costly downtime and several dissatisfied customers.

With the cloud, though, technical problems can be diagnosed and fixed remotely – a particular benefit for retail organisations in remote locations. For instance, we recently implemented a cloud-based EPOS solution for motorway services group, Westmorland Ltd. Rather than dispatching field engineers, we can address any system glitches instantaneously through the cloud, and deploy automatic updates across the network to keep POS devices running at optimum speed.

Importantly, as the requirements of visitors to Westmorland's sites change, retailers have the power to connect new devices to the cloud with great ease. This could mean increasing the points of sale available, including temporary mobile POS for queue busting during peak periods. Equally, it could mean swapping out legacy hardware in favour of more sophisticated solutions as they hit the market.

Ultimately, there are two facts all businesses must face: retail is never going to stand still, and no single point of sale solution will remain fit for purpose forever. Embracing cloud services, however, enables retailers to innovate at a faster pace, and a fraction of the cost, as both their infrastructure and their customers evolve.