

TECHNOLOGY UNDERCOVER: POS SYSTEMS

Part 2 of 2: 16 considerations to help you make the best technology choice for your shop.

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Have you done your homework from last month? I ask that question because this is the second part of an article on point-of-sale (POS) systems, the first installment of which appeared last month, in the October issue (“Vetting the Vendors and the Products”). In that article, I shared a list of the popular vendors and posed some tough questions for you to ask them so you can make the best choice for your shop. To see that first installment, visit www.floristsreview.com/past-issues, and click on the October issue under 2016.

This month, I present the next layer of questions so you're leaving no stone unturned before you make the commitment of time, money and resources to a POS vendor. If some of this language seems too “techy” to you, please don't shy away from it or think you don't need to worry about it. Instead, engage your sales rep and ask him or her to explain the issues or features again with less jargon.

Think about it this way: You can ask a customer if he or she would like a pavé-style arrangement and leave him scratching his head, or you can ask if he or she would like a low and compact design, flush with the rim of the tray or cube container, and leave him with a clear understanding of what he's getting. Likewise, it's your money you're spending on a new POS system, and you are entitled to understand what you are purchasing.

Here are 16 factors I recommend that you consider.

1. WIRE SERVICE OR INDEPENDENT VENDOR

The choice is dependent on your needs, the price of the system and your

affiliation with a wire service. Typically, you cannot quit a wire service and keep its technology, so that's something to check into if you might ever step away from wire-service membership. If you are looking at a new-to-the-market vendor, you should investigate their tech support. The promise of a low price might be offset by not being able to get help when you need it. Another element you may want to factor into your buying decision is the vendor's presence: Do you see them at local and national trade shows? Do they contribute to the industry?

2. SOURCING THE HARDWARE

Are you at liberty to buy your own hardware (and/or use hardware from your old system), or are you bound to getting only “vendor approved” hardware shipped to your store? This can get very expensive very fast.

3. SERVER-BASED OR CLOUD-BASED SYSTEM

On a practical level, flower shops are very dirty, dusty environments that can be hostile to delicate technology, so if you buy a server-based system, you should find a clean place for it, not on the shop floor. Another consideration is that if you don't have a great Internet service provider (ISP), you may not be able to run your system every day at the speed you need. In other words, if you opt for a cloud-based system, you are totally reliant on the stability of your Internet connection to run your business.

4. GROWTH

A very important thing to know is if the system you're considering can and will grow with your company. That is, can it

support multiple locations (stores)? On that topic, investigate how easy (or complicated) it is to move and print orders from store to store.

5. DATA TRANSFER

In 2016, most shops looking for new technology are moving from another supplier. The issue is that you may have spent years building your customers' shopping patterns and history in your current system. How much of that will transfer to the new system? How does the vendor guarantee that data won't be lost? Yes, you read into that correctly; I have seen shops lose all their customer history when switching from one system to another.

6. TRAINING

Some systems rely on you to do the installation and setup—and that's fine if you are even moderately tech-savvy (or you can hire someone to help you). Other vendors (typically the wire services) will send a team to your shop to set up the system. Either way, you need to know what kind of support you and your team will get both on the front end (to learn the basics and start running your shop on the new platform) and on the back end for learning some of the “bells and whistles” once you're comfortable with the core functions.

7. WEBSITE INTEGRATION

This is a very important consideration. Some florists don't mind re-keying each order into their POS systems while others do. Though I don't have a crystal ball, all industry sources point toward an ever-increasing amount of traffic coming into shops via their websites, so consider

that when talking to vendors. Also, it's important to get a POS system that can work with websites from multiple vendors so that you are free to choose and switch website providers.

8. CREDIT-CARD PROCESSING

This is a big one. Find out if you will be able to maintain your current relationship with your local bank or credit-card processor, or if you will be forced to use the vendor's source (often at a less favorable rate for you).

9. SPLIT TENDER

Customers occasionally want to split payment over different cards or payment types. Can this new system do that and do it easily?

10. CASH REGISTER MODE

How quick and easy is it to ring up a "cash-and-carry" sale? Sounds like a nutty question, but I have seen systems that turn that simple task into an epic adventure.

11. DISCOUNTING

If the system cannot quickly and easily apply discounts by a percentage or set amount and allow you to set up default discounts for certain customers, you may want to rethink that vendor.

12. LOYALTY POINTS

Some customers want to be rewarded for loyalty by earning points/credit for shopping at your store. The best POS systems have some sort of program that allows customers to accrue points, track them and use them. Don't settle for a vendor telling you, "We're working on that option." You need it from the start.

13. SMART PRINTING

In other words, does the system print on a worksheet or enclosure card or blank paper based on the data feed, or does it print only on one kind and size of paper?

14. EMAIL CAPABILITIES

Does your new potential system automatically email copies of orders? Delivery confirmations? Statements? Customers today want email communication, so pick a system that does it well.

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15. SALES AND INVENTORY TRACKING

You want a system that makes it easy to track the sales performance of each employee by his or her name or number; you don't want all sales activity batched together. Along the same line, you should investigate how well and how easily potential new systems set up product codes and categories. What about bar-scanning items for sales and inventory tracking?

16. REPORTING

I covered all the things you should be concerned about in regards to getting data into the system, but what about getting it out? You may want to check with your bookkeeper or accountant as to exactly what he or she needs and how easily it can be pulled from the system. You should also ask what built-in reports others use the most to manage their stores.

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go forth, armed with knowledge

I could write five more pages on this topic, but I have to turn you loose at some point to make your decision, sign on the dotted line and get your new system installed. I truly hope that this article will give you some perspective, insight and empowerment to make the best technology choice for your business.

I am happy to discuss any of these topics or your particular store in more detail. Email me at tim@floralstrategies.com, or call me at (800) 983-6184. ■



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