



## Achieving 'happy ever after' with EPoS

Ian Tomlinson, Managing Director of EPoS and e-commerce solution provider, Cybertill, sets out a few tips for success when it comes to selecting an EPoS system and achieving a painless implementation.



### Selecting the system

#### **Retailer, know thyself**

As in so many areas of life, there is nothing to beat self-knowledge. The first ingredient of a successful EPoS purchase is some soul-searching to establish the type of retailer you are and the way in which you envisage your business developing.

Audit your market and your technology and ask yourself if you are keeping up. Don't just look at the problems you are experiencing today. Test any prospective purchase against current issues, and then look beyond them to those that may arise 3-5 years down the line. Bombard yourself with questions and be honest in your answers.

- What is your objective?
- What business problems will this new system solve?
- What is your current level of inhouse expertise?
- What kind of help would you need to run this system successfully?

From this, you can start to build a definitive list of requirements. Every retailer wants business efficiency and increased profits from any investment so it's a good rule of thumb to judge your future purchase against four fundamental, 'more or less' criteria:

- Risk – will this system introduce more or less risk to my business?
- Income – will I generate more income or will the cost outweigh the benefits?
- Time – will the new system require more or less time than I spend on my manual processes or on my current system?

- Expense – will I spend more or less in running costs than I do now?

### **Realistic expectations**

Remember that a software system will highlight both your strengths and your weaknesses. If there are problems in your business, it won't necessarily make them go away. It's important to have realistic expectations but, if you've never used an EPoS before, how can you judge what is realistic?

An IBM study found that 3% of turnover is usually lost via a non-EPoS till, through a combination of unintentional mis-keying and staff fraud. Our experience, now with hundreds of clients, reveals the following levels of improvement that come from use of EPoS, based upon our 'Software as a Service' deployment model.

Firstly, stock holding can be reduced by an average of 30%. This comes from gaining (often for the first time) absolute clarity on what's selling (and therefore the ability to get rid of what's not selling) and an ability to make sure that required stock is always available. With a good EPoS, you can know your product and know your business.

An EPoS system will certainly help you to increase turnover. Here, our clients report an average gain of 10%. Armed with the ability to analyse what you sell and to collect customer information, you'll have the tools to develop good customer relationship management based on customised promotions, prices and communication.

When it comes to gross profit, an increase of 4% to 8 % is to be expected. This comes from a variety of means, including being able to use your accurate sales data to negotiate better supplier terms.

### **Take your time**

Buying an EPoS system isn't simple and it isn't fast. It takes time to select, to implement and to really start to achieve business benefit. It's not a 'plug and go' solution so you need to dedicate time to getting the best out of it. Realise that the investment of your time is a more significant cost than investment in the system purchase.

### **Plugging the gap**

If you are not starting from a blank sheet of paper but have an existing system which you're planning to upgrade, take a hard look at the gaps you need to plug but also make sure you retain all the positive elements that are working for you.

Implementing an EPoS system is not something to be undertaken lightly or frequently. Aim to future-proof your purchase so you don't have to do

this again in 2 years' time. It's rarely easy to predict the pace at which your business will develop, so make sure you invest in a system that is easily scalable, for example where the addition of a new store causes minimal system disruption.

### **Support**

Many EPoS systems have similar capability. What makes the difference between a good system and a great system is invariably the rapport between client and supplier. The calibre of training, support and customisation you may need come down to the level of expertise and experience that your supplier can bring to bear.

Do your homework and make sure that your supplier is stable, financially viable and very experienced. Confirm that you share a common business culture and agree how your relationship will be conducted. Then talk to as many of their clients as is practical and get a feeling for how support will work on a day-to-day basis.

### **Paying the price**

A small note of caution about system cost and negotiation. By all means bargain hard but, at the end of the day, make sure you achieve a good deal for both parties. We've picked up the pieces with many clients who had negotiated a former supplier down to an unrealistic price and were let down by the support and service they subsequently received. Once again, in technology as in life, you get what you pay for.

### **To pilot, or not to pilot**

You're just about to sign the contract and you get cold feet. Should you pilot the system before committing to it wholeheartedly? Whilst pilots can be a good idea, they have inherent problems and the amount of energy needed to pilot can match that required by a full implementation. That's because a successful pilot really is a full implementation, but based upon a prototype store, set up in your boardroom. Ask yourself if you want to do this 2 or 3 times?

Rather, I recommend that you invest the time to work with your supplier to iron out any issues and to get your choice right. And don't underestimate the time needed to take up references and to do this critical task properly.

### **Implementing the system**

So, the decision has been made and you're now ready to plan your implementation. You should bear in mind that implementing an EPoS system can have as big an impact on your business and your staff as moving premises, so plan thoroughly and well ahead.

### **Staff buy-in**

The most successful projects are those where staff have been involved during the entire process and have given their buy-in to the final decision. Hopefully, you will have engaged with your staff and taken their views into account. They'll have been a critical part of your analysis of the business and the elements to fix with a new system.

Now you can start to look at available resources. Evaluate the people and time you need for system roll-out and give consideration to what you have in terms of internal staff and what your supplier can help with. Be confident that your chosen company has the ability to guide you throughout the whole implementation.

### **Get your timing right**

Retailers invariably misjudge how long it takes to implement an EPoS system once an order is placed. Whilst you should allow a minimum of 3 months between your order and being fully operational, there is no right or wrong to this. A system can be implemented in a month or it can take 12 months. It all comes down to how much time and energy you can put into the process. This will be the factor that will determine how quickly you reap the benefits.

It goes without saying that you should choose a time that's right for your business. You know your trading patterns, your quiet times and your peak times. Planning and research may have to take place in a busy trading period, but make sure that you do your implementation and training in a quiet period. As a worked example, if you wanted to start a new calendar year with a new system, I'd recommend you start thinking about your purchase in the summer, do your homework in the autumn and place your order well before Christmas.

### **Train for success**

Even before the system starts to be installed, you can programme in training. Don't expect your staff to be IT experts; use the help and advice of your supplier to manage roll-out. Equally, don't underestimate the value of well-trained staff and the smoothness that training them in good time can bring to the implementation.

For some reason, training seems to be a thorny issue in retail. Clients, big and small, are happy to spend money on hardware and software but they invariably cut corners on training. It's just not a saving worth making. Training at the outset and on an ongoing basis can contribute significantly to the success of your new system and to the business uplift you can expect from it.

You need to accept that there will be some disruption to normal trading. Schedule time for staff training sensibly and, if at all possible, take them

off the shop floor to do this. This time out of the business will help them to learn. So, concentrate on training your staff and on doing it well and you will gain a great foundation to build upon. Good luck!

## **Multi-Channel Retailer Client 1– Bella Natura**

### **The client**

Bella Natura is a company with a conscience. This not-for-profit retail and web shop sells baby and children's organic and fair-trade clothing and accessories. All net profits go to Aids orphans in South Africa.

### **The challenge**

Bella Natura wanted an e-commerce site linked into an EPoS till in its retail outlet to provide real-time, integrated information. The company believed this would make stock control, sales management and order fulfilment more efficient but was concerned about combining stock and managing both systems.

### **The solution**

Cybertill incorporated a preformatted website template into Bella Natura's site, giving greater control from the cybertill back office. EPoS and the website are combined around cybertill's single product file for improved stock control. As 'software as a service', cybertill requires no inhouse IT or staff so one individual can run both store and web site.

### **The benefits**

Bella Natura now reaches a larger customer base at home and abroad, with analytical tools revealing customers' geographic location; useful for marketing strategy. The combined website and EPoS system have optimised stock control, and both operations are controlled from one site.

**"Cybertill has enabled us to reach audiences we couldn't previously engage with."** Jane Morris-Thurgood, founder of Bella Natura.

## **Multi-Channel Retailer Client 2– Boarding Edge**

### **The client**

Boarding Edge supplies cutting-edge snowboard equipment and clothing to UK and European customers. Leading brands can be purchased at the retail outlet, online or by mail-order.

### **The challenge**

Boarding Edge's manual system meant that point-of-sale activities ran in isolation from website sales and stock. The company wanted online

integration with the PoS, with benefits delivered quickly to streamline business processes and reduce the cost of sale.

### **The solution**

Cybertill provided an integrated EPoS and e-commerce system with stock management, customer tracking and purchase order processing. Thanks to a templated approach and design assistance, a branded web site was quickly built.

### **The benefits**

A user-friendly, back-end system allows quick and controlled addition of website content. Secure web payment processing is also offered. The company enjoys the system's ease of use, detailed stock management and improved e-commerce sales.

**"We originally bought the system for e-commerce but the stock control side has made buying much more efficient and accurate."** Graham Bennett, owner of Boarding Edge.