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BY TIM HUCKABEE

maximizing your POS system

You've shelled out for a point-of-sale system. Now, are you using it to its full advantage?

Regardless of whether you buy a point-of-sale (POS) system from a wire service or an independent company, it is meant to be used as a shop management tool, not an expensive electronic order pad.

One of the scariest things I have seen frequently during the past 10 years is the shop that buys a POS system for all the right reasons but ends up using only a small portion of its capabilities. For example, allowing staff to take orders on paper and then enter them later, not paying attention to customers' shopping histories, still using paper slips to coordinate deliveries or not bothering to track replacements.

Why does this happen? The biggest culprit is the lack of extensive training from the very beginning in simple, easy-to-understand language. Your staff may not have been shown (or may never have understood) how to perform the critical functions that are the core reasons for which you bought the POS system.

needs to see and hear an expert actually using the system live in your store, taking orders and utilizing all of the program's features.

I have worked with every POS system on the market—big and small, wire-service-related and independent, Windows-based and text-driven. While I won't name names, I am going to discuss what is applicable to all of them. Feel free to contact me about the training tools I have created for your shop's specific system.

no more excuses

At the start of a training session—once I have made it clear that we are going to cover service, sales and the computer—I get verbally pelted with, "I really don't know how to type, so I am not good at the system." I then ask the staff to hold up and wiggle their fingers; if I see five on every hand, I let them know they are in great shape and tell them to relax. I remind them that so much of what we type on orders is

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For those about to buy or change to a new POS system, insist that the company selling you the system send not just a technician to install the hardware but someone who can teach you how to use it. In other words, your staff

repetitive—hospital addresses, "Happy Birthday" on a card message, etc.

So, your first assignment this month is to make sure every staff member knows how to access the "shortcuts" in your system to type card

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messages and addresses with just a few keystrokes instead of typing out entire words. With some systems, you can take it a step further and create shortcuts even for color schemes or design styles and use them on the product descriptions. Furthermore, visit www.mavisbeacon.com and get a

dynamic typing tutorial for those one-finger, hunt-and-peck typists on staff. They will be up to speed quickly (and left without an excuse not to use the system).

access customer data

Consumers have grown to expect

automation as part of their shopping experiences. I hear frustration over the phone when I am working at a shop without a POS system when a customer, having to repeat critical information, asks, "I just sent flowers last month. Aren't I in your system?" A shop should use technology to make shopping even easier for the customer—and you may end up impressing him or her to boot!

Your next assignment is to remind staff (or show them for the first time) how to access a customer's history when taking an order. For example, as I ask for the recipient's name, I scan the list of that customer's prior orders. Seeing a match, I ask, "Does Ms. Jones still live at 944 Laurel Avenue?" I have taken many orders where customers have said that one of the main reasons they use that shop is that all their information is on file, and that makes shopping so effortless. Food for thought.

create test orders

I commented earlier that I have seen a real lack of extensive training tools for use with most POS systems. And that's a problem, especially for new hires.

So, I have a plan for you. Go into your system and create an order laden with all the common problems that regularly frustrate you. Let me share examples from the pantheon of recurring mistakes: misspelled street names, improper card message punctuation, wrong delivery dates, poor product descriptions, and wrong account or billing information.

Add these items, along with your own personal gremlins, to the sample order you create. Once done, cancel or delete the order so it's not accidentally filled or delivered. Then put that order number on a lined sheet of paper, and ask your staff to pull up the order and locate the problems. Don't stop there; have your staff also tell you why those items are problems—like how a mis-

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spelled street name might prevent the order from zoning properly in your system, for example.

Once you create awareness of these problems, you should see them begin to diminish. Test your staff once a month with a new “problem order” you have created based on the most recent transgressions you have observed.

track replacements

One of the questions I ask each training group at a store is how many replacements they do each month. Most people will think for a moment and then say that there are very few—maybe one or two. OK, great, but if each group of employees (usually three in a day) tells me the same thing, that indicates at least three to six monthly replacements.

Again, I see people revert to paper on this, scribbling the details on the original order and submitting that to the design department. Instead, use your system to do the math for you. Some programs will allow the creation of replacement orders while others can be adjusted to accept a unique product code for replacements. The important point is that at the end of the month, you can track that data. First, how much did those replacements cost you? Second, depending on your system, you can track the replacements by the reasons for the problems. In other words, if you see that five of your six replacements were for roses, that should alert you to a problem with your supplier or how they are being processed or delivered.

My strongest advice is to start looking at your POS system as a member of your team. Formally introduce your staff to this “team member,” and make sure they know how to get the most help from this colleague, especially at Mother’s Day! ■

Tim Huckabee is president of FloralStrategies, an on-site training organization for retail florists based in New York, N.Y. For further help with selling, contact him by phone at (800) 983-6184 or by e-mail at contact@floralstrategies.com, or visit www.floralstrategies.com.



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