

Don't Send Customers Away Empty-Handed

▲ A legacy POS left Pacers Sports & Entertainment patrons standing in long checkout lines during intermission. A new solution helped boost sales 15%.

by Jay McCall

The saying, “You never get a second chance to make a good first impression,” was probably invented for retail, because it fits so well. It’s almost inevitable that if you don’t take care of your customers today, you won’t get a second chance tomorrow to make it up to them. Taking care of customers with kind words and other pleasantries is only part of the equation. You need to add ‘fast service’ to the equation to be effective. Pacers Sports & Entertainment (PS&E) (Indianapolis) knows this truth as well as anyone. PS&E operates the Conseco Fieldhouse, a facility that seats 18,345 guests and is home to the Indiana Pacers as well as many events such as circuses, concerts, and theatrical productions. The retailer sells souvenirs, clothing, sports memorabilia, and other merchandise at its main store within the field house as well as at a nearby mall store.

Legacy System Causes Long Checkout Lines

When the Conseco Fieldhouse opened its doors for business in November 1999, PS&E and Indiana sports fans were ready to play ball; but, the retailer’s POS wasn’t up for the challenge. The POS was a DOS-based mainframe

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solution that was unable to accommodate PS&E’s merchandise needs. “Our legacy system was more suited for hard goods than apparel,” recalls Gary Nelson, director of merchandising/retail at PS&E. “We didn’t have the ability to segment our inventory by size, and we had to go through many gyrations just to print a sales report.” Inadequate reporting functionality was the least of PS&E’s complaints about its legacy system. The fact that it routinely froze up during credit or debit card transactions was a major issue. The majority of PS&E’s merchandise sales occurs during intermission. Customers want to be able to browse quickly, buy a few items, and hurry back to their seats before intermission concludes. They did not pay good money for those seats just to wait in lines. PS&E’s legacy

system dropped the ball when it came to processing debit card and credit card transactions. “Credit card transactions routinely took up to 90 seconds,” recalls Nelson. “Plus, we were devoting a lot of IT time to keep the system up and running, and manually restoring data that was lost during a system freeze-up.” Customers would often lose patience with the sluggish POS system. Those standing

Installation Profile

Technology User: Pacers Sports & Entertainment (PS&E) (Indianapolis) operates the Conseco Fieldhouse, a facility that seats 18,345 guests and is home to the Indiana Pacers as well as many events such as circuses, concerts, and theatrical productions. The retailer sells souvenirs, clothing, sports memorabilia, and other merchandise at its main store within the field house as well as at a nearby mall store.

Problem: A healthy portion of PS&E’s merchandise sales occurs at intermissions during the games or other events. Previously, PS&E’s debit and credit card payment processing solution took 60 to 90 seconds to complete a transaction. Long checkout lines and frustrated patrons were a clear signal the retailer had to fix its ailing POS.

Solution: PS&E replaced its legacy POS with a new solution that comprised Run.It Systems’ (New York) real-time POS software, Shift4 Corp.’s Internet-based credit card transaction software, IBM touch screens, and Epson printers. The new solution reduced credit card transactions to 2 seconds and contributed to a 15% increase in sales.

CASE STUDY

POS ■ Payment Processing



Implementing new POS hardware and software, which included a new payment processing solution, contributed to a 15% increase in sales for Pacers Sports & Entertainment.

toward the back of the line would return their merchandise and walk out of the store empty-handed. Before long, it became painfully obvious that PS&E's POS needed to be benched — permanently.

Internet-Enabled POS Scores High

After doing an Internet search for a replacement POS, PS&E discovered Run.It Systems (New York). Run.It Systems offered a POS suite with inventory management, purchase order, and reporting modules that met PS&E's criteria. Besides upgrading its POS, the vendor also

recommended changes be made to other hardware and software components. PS&E replaced its cash drawers and printers with IBM touch screen units and Epson printers. Additionally, PS&E installed new credit card transaction software from Shift4 Corp. Nelson opted to do a manual data migration from the legacy system to the new solution. "We felt the upgrade was a good opportunity to check the quality of our data," recalls Nelson. "The last thing we wanted was to invest money in a new system and populate it with bogus data."

Within two months the new system was up and running. And, PS&E employees weren't the only ones who noticed the difference. "Patrons would often comment to

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our cashiers how fast the checkout process was," says Nelson. "With the new system, cashiers could swipe the customer's credit card and hand the customer back their card along with the receipt." Credit card and debit card transaction times dropped from 90 seconds to 2 seconds. This enabled PS&E to



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take care of many more customers during event intermissions. Sales following the new POS upgrade were 15% higher than the previous year with overall attendance remaining steady.

PS&E's new solution wasn't just faster than its predecessor; it was more reliable, too. "We devote 75% less time supporting our new system," says Nelson. "We simply don't have the system freeze-ups, crashes, and data loss issues that once plagued us." Another feature that the retailer enjoys is being able to do realtime merchandise look-ups. If, for instance, the Conseco Fieldhouse store sells out of an Indiana Pacers jacket, the cashier can check to see whether the mall store has one in stock and can have it held for the customer. This feature is just one more sign of PS&E's commitment to its customers that it won't send them away empty-handed. □

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