

August 2018 • pdra.org

PAINT & DECORATING

Published by the Paint & Decorating Retailers Association

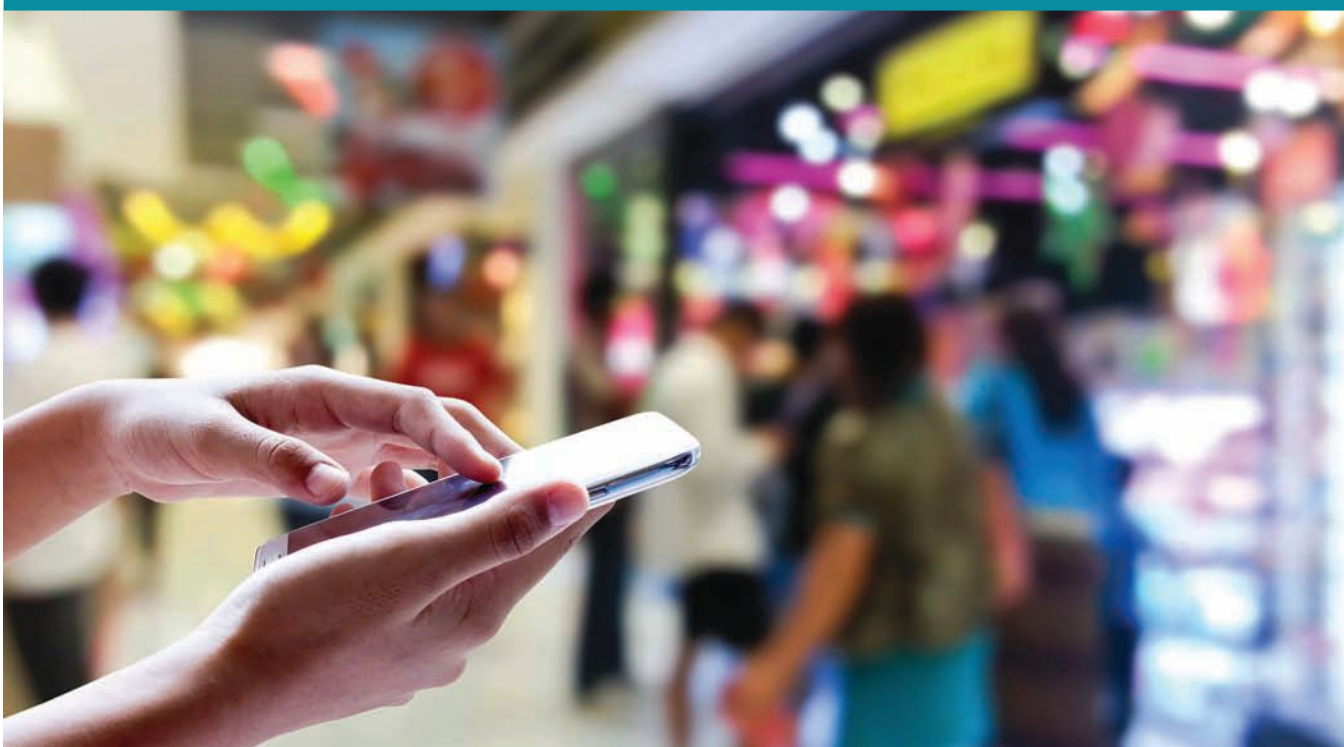
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Stepping Right Up

Maximize Training Opportunities for Your Business 34

Operations: Mobile In-Store Technology 24 • Profile: Standard Paint & Flooring 46



Keeping Your Business Moving

Using Mobile Technology to Improve Operations and Expand Customer Service

We live in a mobile society, and the businesses that don't go along for the ride could be left in the dust. Mobile technology is no longer the future—it's the reality of now. Fortunately, point-of-sale vendors are providing mobile solutions that allow retailers to be more agile while also meeting the needs of customers who rely on their mobile devices more than ever before.

Just how important is this mobile trend? Sandi Thomas, vice president of product marketing for retail and LBM for Epicor Software Corp., cites a Boston Retail Partners survey which reports that 89 percent of retailers will be offering mobile solutions for associates by 2020 and 84 percent of retailers will be using mobile point of sale by that time.

"Mobile technology is becoming pervasive—and really required—across all retail industries," Thomas says. "Retailers are using mobile applications, like Epicor® Eagle Mobile+™ software, to arm associates with the mobile tools to complete physical counts, make pricing adjustments and assist

consumers anytime, anywhere—whether in the aisles or at a sidewalk sale. Without a trip to the checkout counter or workstation, staff can quickly check a list price, loyalty price, quantity on hand, quantity on order and when the next order is arriving on any item in real time."

Thomas adds that mobile POS devices have the ability to increase sales and loyalty by line-busting, doing house account checkouts or by completing sales on the spot for shoppers in high-traffic areas of the store. They can also provide real-time access to inventory, pricing and product details. Jim Franco, CEO of Autologue Computer Systems Inc., agrees.

"A lot of forward-thinking paint retailers are equipping their salespeople on the floor with tablets for pricing and product information, which improves the customer buying experience," he says. "We also offer eSalesBI/CRM, which allows retailers to contact commercial accounts, provide alerts, schedule appointments and review business information for the past two years with a manager dashboard operating on a tablet."

What Mobile Can Do for You

“More retailers are gravitating toward mobile technology,” says Robert Josefs, marketing operations manager for Celerant Technology Corp., which has been providing modern and mobile POS systems for the paint and decorating industry for over 30 years. He acknowledges that some retailers have shied away from implementing mobile technology because of cost, lack of resources or limitations from current providers, but he encourages them to consider the gains that can be made with mobile in terms of sales and operational efficiencies.

“A lot of retailers in the home improvement sector view POS and mobile technology as a cost center and not as a revenue generator,” Josefs says. “While all POS systems ring up sales, only experienced POS vendors can enable their retail clients to retain customers, streamline processes and increase the bottom line through mobile retail solutions. And it’s the mobile retailers—along with their mobile customers—who benefit the most from POS software.”



Your POS vendor likely has opportunities to expand mobile technology in your business to offer services like mobile checkout.

Josefs identifies three categories of mobile technology: mobile POS, mobile inventory and mobile email marketing.

Each category presents unique benefits and opportunities. See how mobile POS, mobile inventory and mobile email marketing can benefit your operation here. Go to Page 30 for insights into why you should invest in mobile e-commerce.

Mobile POS allows you to...

- Enable your staff to look up prices, create purchase orders, accept credit cards and complete transactions from anywhere in the store. “Imagine how much better the experience would be if you can help a contractor locate all the products they need, apply contractor pricing and ring them up—all without leaving their side,” Josefs says.
- Help shoppers compare prices in your aisles, which could increase the chance they buy from you and not the competitor down the street.
- Bring your business anywhere, such as a sidewalk sale, trade show, in-home consultation or contractor’s job site.

Mobile inventory allows you to...

- Scan inventory using a PDT (portable data terminal) or other hand-held device, which can decrease errors and increase efficiency.
- Perform cycle counts or physical inventories as well as make purchasing, receiving or inventory adjustments; price changes; and multistore transfers. “Retailers who utilize our inventory solution realize a dramatic increase in efficiency and accuracy across the board, including accuracy, on-hand quantities, labor savings and turnover,” Josefs says.

Mobile email marketing allows you to...

- Create personalized and automated email campaigns based on your customers’ prior purchases, brand preferences and demographics.
- Increase email open rates by sending professional email campaigns that look great on any device and email client.
- Make it easier for your audience to follow through with your campaign’s calls to action on any device, including downloading coupons, submitting online reviews, viewing their shopping cart or checking a gift card balance.

The most important task mobile technology accomplishes is provide and generate information at the moment you need it. Thomas points out that applications like Epicor Eagle Mobile Manager software make critical customer, item, sales and inventory information accessible through a mobile device.



Mobile technology in the retail environment connects stationary POS systems to devices like smartphones and tablets. These portable devices can keep retailers tuned into their sales, inventory counts and other crucial information from anywhere.

“BOPIS, for instance, could use mobile POS to facilitate the transaction at a service desk and save the customer valuable time while completing the transaction.”

—Sandi Thomas, Epicor Software Corp.

“This functionality enables retailers to make smarter buying decisions at co-op shows and markets by checking an item’s cost, stock levels and outstanding orders—without leaving the vendor’s booth,” she says. “Epicor Eagle N Series® software uses the capability of mobile devices allowing overrides and alerts via text, improving management response time, and ultimately, customer service. Managers can also use a mobile app to discreetly input competitor’s prices at their store and feed it back to their Eagle retail business management solution to ensure their prices are competitive.”

Epicor Eagle software works with iOS, Windows, and Android mobile applications, as well as specific mobile POS devices and RF scanners, Thomas says.

“The devices can be used for a variety of functions: inventory search, purchasing, loyalty programs, customer checkout and merchandising. Eagle software streamlines ordering, helping retailers buy smarter to avoid stockouts and overstocks.”

There are several initiatives across retail that impact the use of devices, according to Thomas. “BOPIS (buy online, pickup in store), for instance, could use mobile POS to facilitate the transaction at a service desk and save the customer valuable time while completing the transaction. Eagle software also offers a tool called Mobile Manager, which is designed to keep store managers connected to critical business information, vital alerts, analytics, reports and more, right on a smartphone or tablet.”

One retailer using the capabilities provided by mobile technology is Barrydowne Paint, a retailer in Sudbury, Ontario, that is utilizing an omnichannel strategy to provide a seamless shopping experience for its customers. “We have three busy retail locations and an e-commerce site,” says general manager Kelly Scott. “We have our delivery vehicles and outside sales team equipped with mobile POS so we can transact right on the spot.”

Mobile technology also facilitates in-store transactions at Barrydowne Paint, which uses Epicor POS and has its e-commerce site built on the Shopify platform. Thanks to the mobile capability,

Continued on Page 30

Continued from Page 27

sales associates are able to work with customers at various points throughout the store. For instance, if a customer is shopping in the color studio area, a sales associate can help with product selections, look up inventory, create a sales order, complete the monetary transaction and email receipts—without ever requiring the customer to step up to the sales counter.

“On a busy Saturday, it’s great to be able to serve customers in the aisle or wherever they happen to be in the store without needing them to stand in a long line at the cash register,” says Scott. “We want to make the retail experience more engaging for our customers. Our goal is to bring that functionality without the traditional checkout method. By having the e-commerce site at their fingertips, staff members are able to pull up products on the tablet and show customers features, benefits and pricing. We think this is much better than simply speaking about a can or product that the customer can’t see.”

Barrydowne Paint has seen robust product ordering through its e-commerce site. “The fastest-growing aspect of our business is people who shop online and elect for an in-store pickup,” Scott says, noting that there is no

delivery charge for purchases of \$50 or more. “We offer two-hour delivery windows, serving a 20-mile radius around our stores, but over 90 percent of all online orders are in-store pickup. That’s been the most surprising element of e-commerce for us—people ordering product online and saying, ‘I’d just like to pick it up.’”

A Long Way to Go

While mobile technology is being used in the paint store environment, there is still a long way to go before usage becomes common.

“Mobile technology is being used by many retailers but only in limited areas,” says Ward Partridge, co-president of CBC Computer Systems Inc. “Primarily, we see mobile devices used for inventory control (counting, ordering, pricing) and for CRM applications for stores that have outside sales forces. While many POS systems can run on Wi-Fi tablets for in-store checkout, these have not been well adopted, which I think is due to the nature of paint stores versus other retailers. Paint stores need to input and capture more details on each sale, including customer information, color formula details, job information and monitor different price levels. It all practically requires a keyboard to properly process orders.”

3 Reasons to Invest in E-Commerce

E-commerce is becoming more important in the retail paint and decorating market. Retailers are finding ways to create an e-commerce component so as to not cede that space to their competitors. As with other mobile technologies, their POS vendors are helping.

“E-commerce is a necessity in today’s marketplace to compete with big-box stores and online stores,” says Jim Franco, CEO of Autologue Computer Systems Inc. “In the future, if paint retailers do not adopt technology, they could be put out of business.”

Read on to learn how and why you should transition your business online.

1. You can offer tools your customers need.

“Decor Fusion has a new contractor portal for commercial customers to check previously used paint and colors, download details on products purchased for job costing and manage their store accounts,” says Ward Partridge of CBC Computer Systems Inc. “These features will be expanded later this year to enable online account payments and potentially repeat product orders.”

2. Going online doesn’t mean decreasing store traffic.

Though e-commerce is an increasing force in the market, Partridge sees the unique nature of the paint business as a reason for customers to still drive to a store. For one thing, customers are going to want to see colors in person rather than rendered on a computer screen. “Also, online sales remove the personal, professional advice you get in a store and the chance to build relationships in person,” he says.

3. Being online means being an immediate resource.

The No. 1 reason to be online is so customers can quickly see which products you sell and what you have in stock, especially when they’re in the middle of a project.

A mobile-friendly website should have a section for contractors, homeowners, loyalty rewards and specials. This is particularly important for those who need last-minute supplies while on the job. Unless a customer is 100 percent loyal to a particular retailer or there’s a lack of competitors in the area, the retailer has to make it easy when a customer needs them most—otherwise they will go somewhere else.



That being said, the company's Decor Fusion system works well with many mobile devices. "CBC does see Decor Fusion run on Windows Surface tablets and laptops (with cellular 4G connections) being used by sales representatives in the field. These mobile devices allow the users full capabilities to enter orders, develop job quotes, effect price adjustments and check stock in real time," says Partridge, adding that Decor Fusion supports a range of hand-held devices, including RF guns for inventory work, Samsung tablets for delivery orders, Windows Surface tablets for field use and cellphones for customer use in managing their purchases and store accounts.

"The adoption rate for mobile technology has generally been slow," Partridge says. "However, it really depends on the store management and their 'tech savviness.' CBC certainly sees larger, high-volume stores embracing the technology much faster, and they need to in order to efficiently manage their stores and keep up with the competition."

Retailers with multiple stores are finding mobile technology especially useful for inventory-related tasks. Chicago-area retailer JC Licht, which utilizes the Decor Fusion system at its 36 stores, confirms that the RF gun technology has greatly enhanced efficiencies. "In our stores, we use RF guns daily to check stock and receive and place orders," says vice president and chief operating officer Tom Hartzell. "The speed in which these devices operate saves hours a day. Our store teams historically would walk the store with paper and pen writing orders. With an RF gun they can place, upload and EDI an order to a manufacturer in half the time, and more accurately than a handwritten order."

Michael Yang, president of Creative Paint in the San Francisco area, likewise finds mobile technology to be a critical component for his 10-store operation. "We use an RF gun for inventory—that's one of the things we use all the time," says Yang, who uses the Epicor Eagle system. "We're able to do centralized ordering and utilize the technology for transferring products from one store to another. We use mobile lookup for inventory information and Mobile Manager to get basic customer information or when traveling between stores. The sales team uses mobile lookup to determine which store has the available inventory."

Single-store operations likewise can see reasons for adopting the technology as a means to improve efficiencies. Jason Van, vice president of City Paint & Glass in McComb, Mississippi, is eyeing the addition of mobile inventory as an upgrade for his Retail Star POS system for the future. "I think it would be useful for inventory control and preselling—letting someone know you have plenty of stock on hand," Van says. "We're trying to keep our inventory smaller, and having mobile access to inventory information would be a definite advantage." ●



Top: RF guns allows retailers to check inventory and place orders with more accuracy than checking and ordering by hand.

Bottom: Tablets, like the Microsoft Surface, are an option for retailers who want to have information for customers and other team members throughout the store.