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Convenience Store News

WHAT'S NEXT IN CONVENIENCE AND PETROLEUM RETAILING

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Boost Productivity, Customer Satisfaction with Mobile Solutions

By [Tammy Mastroberte](#)



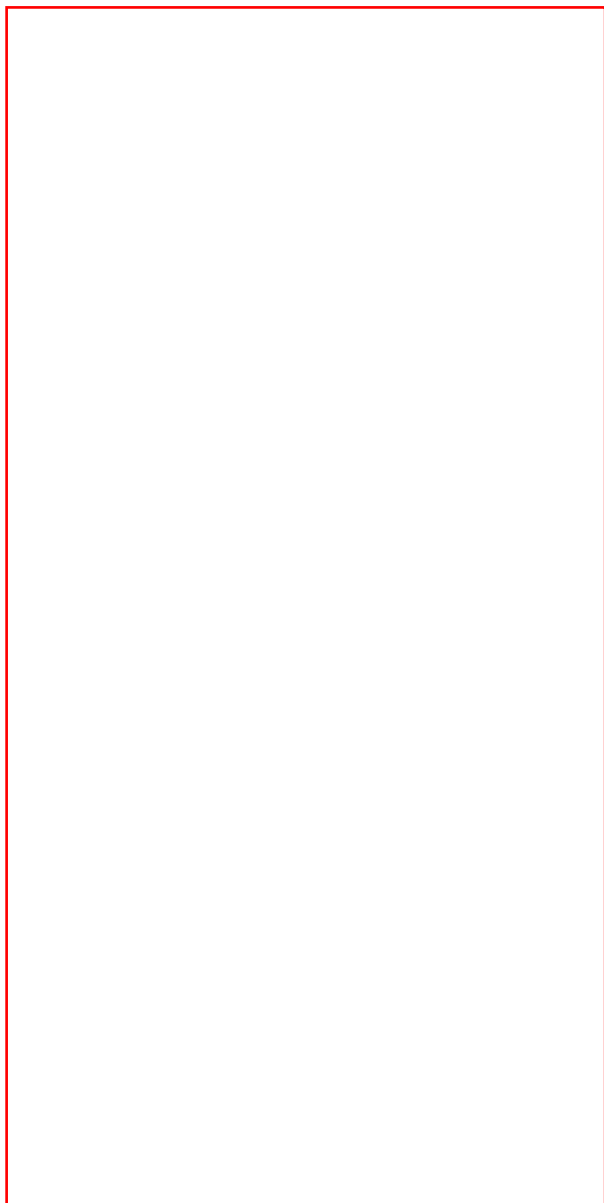
NEW YORK -- Customer satisfaction is important across all retail channels, but it's even more important for c-stores, due to the small amount of time they have with customers. Getting customers what they want and moving them in and out quickly is imperative, and retailers are testing new options, whether that means getting the store manager out of the back office and onto the sales floor or offering faster payment options at the checkout.

In a Webinar yesterday afternoon hosted by *Convenience Store News* and called "Retail Recession Buster Strategies: Embrace End-to-End Mobile Solutions and Improve Productivity Immediately," CSNews Editor-in-Chief Don Longo gave examples of convenience retailers utilizing mobile solutions, including Sheetz Inc. and BP, which are testing mobile payment options using cell phones and high-tech stickers with contactless readers to speed the checkout process—and Sheetz even tied it into its proprietary loyalty card. The Webinar was sponsored by Motorola and Zebra Technologies.

On the grocery front, Brookshire Grocery, an 80-plus chain with stores across Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi, deployed a price optimization solution for its fuel operations with a mobile component, allowing grocers to react faster to area competition. Utilizing solutions from vendor KSS, including PriceNet, PriceNet Mobile and KSS Visualizer, users can enter competitors' prices into their mobile device while on the road, and can receive price proposals in seconds sent directly to their mobile device for approval and implementation.

Longo also cited a poll by Harrison Interactive that found 45 percent of consumers polled responded they would use cell phones to buy products at stores.

"Smartphones change everything," said Ed Weiser, principle consultant of mobile solutions at Motorola, who also spoke during the Webinar. "Consumers are in your stores with tools in their hands, where they can get more information than you have and compare products and features."



Share Your Special Memories

But mobility also means marketing. In the c-store space, Circle K piloted a text messaging program in the Phoenix area to send customers coupons, while BP partnered with Garmin GPS to allow devices to show ads on the screen for nearby BP stations and offers.

On the operations front, retailers are looking to improve productivity and cut costs internally with mobile solutions as well. In the 2009 *Convenience Store News* Technology Study, 3.4 percent of retailers surveyed currently use mobile solutions, and 12.4 percent are exploring the option.

During his presentation, Weiser shared the top 10 store system priorities for retailers according to the RIS' 2009 Store Systems Study. Topping the list was PCI compliance, loss prevention and inventory visibility, followed by advanced loyalty programs, speeding the customer checkout process, reducing out of stocks, workforce management, cross channel integration and kiosks.

Weiser also cited the top retail pain points, including competitive pressures and sales, shrink, out of stocks, inefficient processes, manager paperwork, employee turnover, customers' desire for self-service, PCI and data security requirements.

Mobile workforce solutions, whether a mobile point-of-sale (POS) or payment device, will help get store managers out of the back office and onto the sales floor, which can provide immediate return-on-investment (ROI), he explained.

"Today the average number of employee mobile devices per store is four, and by 2010 it will be 16 devices per store, according to AMR Research," said Weiser.

Looking at the top four mobility trends, he noted convergence of LAN/WAN networks; implementation of mobile POS, checkout and marketing; mobilizing the store and department management with mobile printing; and compliance initiatives as priorities.

During an interactive poll of the audience, live participants said they were most interested in self-service (28.5 percent) and mobilizing store manager's tasks (28.5 percent), but many also reported interest in in-store voice and data capabilities (21.4 percent) and regulatory requirements for PCI (21.4 percent).

When looking at mobile computers, Bill Taggart, business development manager for Zebra Technologies, pointed out besides choosing which one to buy, it is also important to deploy it correctly, and learn to "live with it."

"You need to make sure the store side and the IT side work together during deployment, and in terms of living with the device, you need to know about battery life, PCI and data security," he said.

Trends driving mobile technology, according to Taggart, include labor costs, labor shortages, profit margin pressures and consumers continually demanding more.

Mobile printing, specifically for labels, has been proven in real-life examples to reduce more than 30 minutes of labor time per store employee, said Taggart, and also offers enhanced pricing control.

"By freeing associates to take better care of customers and improve the store appearance, it will translate to a better customer experience," he said.

In the last poll question, participants were asked to choose which area of their business current economic conditions have had the most impact: 43.7 percent reported increased pricing sensitivity; 37.5 percent chose the pressures on gross margins; 12.5 percent tighter labor costs; and 6.2 percent chose greater need for inventory optimization.

Listen and view the archived version of the Webinar at www.nielsencast.com



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