

# **How to choose the right POS software for your bike shop**

By Mark Fletcher, CEO, Tower Systems

*Selecting the right software for any small business is a daunting task. In this article, Mark Fletcher provides some advice designed to guide bike shop owners to the right decision on POS software for their business.*

Choosing the right software for your Bike Shop can be easy if you follow some simple steps: be sure of what your business needs; understand what your suppliers will expect; understand the value of this to your business; and, remain focused on the business outcomes important to you.

It is easy for software sales people to engage in all manner of games and tactics to confuse you. This can be avoided if you stick to the simple steps and stay in control. Some sales people need to be reminded that this is your choice and your choice alone.

Bike Shops do have needs which are unique to their product category. While they also share needs with all retailers, it is the unique needs which will gain most attention.

While I could write thousands of words on how to go about determining your needs and preparing an appropriate specification document, the reality for many Bike Shops, such effort is not appropriate. Instead, I recommend a single sheet of paper approach. It's easy and achievable by business people of all skill sets.

So, take out a sheet of paper rule a line down the middle. On the left hand side, note down the key computer system requirements which you consider are be unique to your business. What is it you do which you feel no other Bike Shop would require? Do you have unique suppliers? Are your suppliers able to transact with you electronically – receiving electronic purchase orders and providing electronic invoices? Are your products packaged in an unusual way? Do you operate off a non standard markup policy?

Most good Point of Sale systems have common functionality in the traditional areas of selling, printing receipts, handling customer accounts, managing discounting and reporting on sales. It is in the 'fringe' where you will find differences and these often are differences in businesses as well.

In creating this list of functions and facilities which are unique to your business consider these questions:

- How do you handle Lay Bys? Is your approach common? What are the rules you have for Lay Bys?
- Do you have a loyalty program and if so are there processes unique to you?
- Does the system need to handle warranties and if so how?
- Do you assemble items – made up of other items?
- How do you sell your product? Do you sell by weight or some unusual method?
- Do you have specific suppliers you need to place electronic orders with?
- Do you need to compare the performance of multiple suppliers in a specific department?
- How do you market to existing customers and would you want your software to help?

Next to each of your key requirements be sure to note the amount of time you spend with current systems and processes. This could be the amount of time you save by purchasing the right system.

There are other business specific questions and requirements you could consider. The list above is provided to stimulate your thoughts about the needs you have in your Bike Shop.

It may be that your needs are not covered in any existing system. This is when you need to decide on whether the cost of NOT having access to these needs being covered is worth the considerable saving of going with an off the shelf system.

On the right hand side of the paper, note down what is important to you in the software company from which you purchase your Bike Shop software. These points ought to be the must haves without which you will knock out a business. For what it's worth and based on many years serving small businesses, here are my suggestions for this list:

- **They are committed to your market.** While anyone can claim to have a system which suits Bike shops, it will be important for the long term relationship that they have a commitment to the retail space in which you operate.

- **They own the software.** There is nothing worse than buying through an agent who does not have easy direct access to the software developers.
- **They have Bike shop customers who are happy.**
- **The software is regularly updated.** Software updates need to include new facilities based on suggestions from Bike Shop owners.
- **The software is yours to keep.** Once you purchase the software you do not have to pay further licencing fees to use the software. Some systems are licenced annually – meaning you MUST pay a fee to keep the software active.
- **Easy support access.** 24/7 software support is available. Online as well as telephone support is available.
- **User meetings.** Make sure there are opportunities for you to meet with other users and representatives from the company. These are excellent learning opportunities which help you unlock the real value of your software.
- **Training.** Ensure that the system is provided with on site training by the company itself and not a third party.
- **Enhancement suggestions.** Make sure that the software company has a mechanism for you making your enhancement suggestions known to them.

Once you have this sheet of paper you are almost ready to start shopping around.

Take some time to get together copies of all the key documents you use. You will need to compare these with what any POS system you consider offers. This includes receipts, orders, reports and especially any spreadsheets you work on to manage the business.

You are almost ready to look at possible systems. First up, compare the websites of the companies you are considering. Be sure to assess the ease of navigation of the websites, the professionalism and speed. These are all indicators of the software the companies sell.

When you are ready, arrange the demonstrations. Book these for your Bike Shop so that the sales people can see your business first hand. If they offer you a demonstration copy of the software say no as this is a lazy way to sell, leaving you to do all the work.

Set a time limit for the demonstration and always remain in control. This purchase is about you and NOT about them. Some will use all manner of awful tactics to try and get you to

buy their systems. Remaining in control will help you resist this and lead you to buying the best POS software for your Bike Shop.

If, after the first demonstration, you cannot decide between, say, two systems. Invite them back to demonstrate again at the same time so that you really can compare apples with apples. Many software companies will reject this, preferring to deal one on one with you.

When you feel ready to make a decision, ask for three reference sites. Call them. But understand that you will only be given good reference sites so ask these folk if they know anyone else using the software.

If you have time, visit the offices of the software company – there is nothing like seeing how they operate internally to assess whether you want to do business with them. Is it a happy and professional workplace? Do the employees seem stressed? Do the people you would have most to do with seem to want your business?

The ultimate choice you will make is about the people more than the software. This is why I recommend taking your time and assessing the various people you will rely on to make the software work for your business. While this focus on the company and its people may seem like a lot of work, the reality is that this is a long term relationship. The more effort you put into courting phase the more likely the relationship will survive and your business thrive.

Good luck. Choosing the right software for your Bike Shop can set your business up for wonderful success for years to come.

#### **About Tower Systems**

Tower Systems began in 1981 in Melbourne Australia. Since its formation, the business has focused solely on the needs of small business retailers. Today, the company serves in excess of 2,000 small business retailers in Australia, New Zealand, FIJI and several Asian countries. Tower Systems has offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Auckland. Tower Systems is a proud supporter of the Lighthouse Foundation, an organisation working with troubled young people in need of a caring home environment.

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