# IT'S TIME YOU PUT YOUR RETAIL STORE ON 'AUTO' MODE!

## Here's a free/low-cost retail business management solution that lets you automate your retail store, using just a computer and an Internet connection!

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*"We live in a time when automation is ushering in a second industrial revolution."*
*—Adlai E. Stevenson (American politician)*

At a time when customers have multiple avenues to explore to make purchases, both offline and online, retail stores that still run the good old way are finding it difficult to woo customers. With the introduction of tax laws like VAT/GST and the customers' growing belief that businesses which generate computer invoices are more trust-worthy—adopting billing and business management solutions is on the upswing among retailers. Changes in consumer expectations, the market environment and statutory compliance needs are accelerating the adoption of IT solutions across all segments of the retail business. However, if you still are running most of your retail operations manually or via disparate software, it is time you adopted a smart solution that could

do the needful at a low cost, or for free—to put your business on the fast track.

## But is it possible to automate your business for free…or a low cost?

With the cost of technology reducing, and IT solutions becoming available on rent or on a pay-as-you-go basis, it has become possible for even small players to adopt technology tools. This article introduces you to a retail business management solution called TruePOS, which has a free Internet-based version and one that is low-cost and available via the Internet on rent. This means that the solution is a subscription-based (SaaS) service. It enables you to integrate and view the operations happening at your single or multiple stores at the click of a few buttons. In case you have more than one store, you can view the interconnected operations of the different branches and manage them from a central location. The solution is especially meant for small store format retail chains and is free for retailers who generate upto 100 bills per month. For larger stores, there are several service packs available at a reasonable cost, depending on the size and scale of the business, says Kumar Vembu, CEO, GoFrugal Technologies.

## The need for a POS solution

But let's first understand why you ought to invest in a solution like POS. Implementing a business management solution like POS and using it effectively keeps business heads well informed about the gross margins earned. It also helps them lower the inventory investments and increase the inventory returns. Overall, the business can be run more profitably with a lower investment and operating cost.

Vinod Panicker, CFO, Outlook Magazine, agrees and shares the reasons why his publication opted for a business management solution. "We were using a standalone POS solution for invoicing, and Tally software for our accounting needs but there was no solution for inventory control. This made it important for us to adopt a solution that could address all the retail business processes, like purchase, stock allocation, sales/sales returns, and so on.

"And TruePOS helped us automate the distribution process of our publication. We verify and monitor the stock based on the issue dates and using this, we easily get to know the status of stocks sold and returned."

## The SaaS advantage

Since the solution is offered on rent, customers can pay as they use it. This reduces the capital expense [capex] of the retailer and translates into an operational expense [opex], which is a great advantage, says Ketan Sanghvi, co-founder, Zoomin, a photo sharing, printing and custom gifting service. Apart from this, a quick and faster implementation cycle was one compelling reason to switch to TruePOS, he adds. Since it is a Web-based solution, it allows you to access your retail store's business information via multiple channels like laptops, netbooks, PDAs, tablet PCs, touchscreen kiosks, etc. Besides, this kind of a solution removes the barrier of technical complexity and risk, and is most affordable. It also comes with the power of scalability, says Raghavan H K N, national head, Retail, EDK, an organisation that uses the TruePOS solution with offline support. This means that there is no downtime and the retailers can

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continue with their business and generate invoices even when the Internet connectivity gets disabled. "Apart from this, the retailer gets all the benefits of a SaaS service such as elasticity of the solution, which can be scaled up as the business grows or scaled down if the business slows down," adds Vembu.

As far as the security of the data goes, Vembu affirms that the business critical data on the remote database is encrypted (coded in machine language to ensure security) and backed up, daily.

## Getting a bird's eye view of the business

Another advantage of adopting a POS solution is that it enables retailers to get a bird's eye view of their business, which in turn helps senior managers to take sound business decisions, on-the-fly, based on the analysis of facts made available via the system, avers Raghavan.

K Satyanarayan, co-founder, New Horizon Media (NHM), a book publishing company, agrees and speaks

of how opting for the POS solution helped the key members of the management in their decision making process: "The solution has helped us capture customer information, their purchase behaviour and other relevant data, which has played a very critical role in our growth, over time. Such data gives us enormous insights on where to focus and implement specific promotions instead of mass-media campaigns."

## The ROI

By automating the processes that you are currently carrying out manually, you can save significant amounts of time and money, whilst increasing the efficiency of your business operations, says Vembu. Panicker confirms: "After deploying the POS solution in our company, the entire business operates with thin margins of wastage. This has lowered the supply chain and logistics costs. The lowered total cost of ownership of the solution and the ability to manage a network of over 25 stock locations, centrally, has been a huge ROI. Reports generated via the system add to the intangible benefits like re-ordering based on stock levels. Allocating/re-allocating stock procured for a customer or location can be done very easily with TruePOS."

Talking about the benefits that NHM has experienced with the POS solution, Satyanarayan adds: "The ability to carry the POS service to every book fair and stall facilitates quick service to customers. Also, the offline functionality helps us operate stalls in areas where there is no network coverage. At the end of the day when we perform online synchronisation, the warehouse module registers the customer preferences of a particular area and so we despatch books in the fast moving categories to that location. This helps us to be agile and maximise our business every day. The total cost of ownership of TruePOS makes it ideally suited for businesses on the move, like ours. Increased customer satisfaction, sales efficiency and effective inventory management solutions are some intangible benefits."

## A quick comparison

Let's now look at how the solution compares with the other free and open source retail applications available online. To this, Vembu says: "In the business application space, open source solutions are not as successful as they are in the IT infrastructure or general tools space. The reason is that businesses need specific features, functions and processes that are unique to their industry and nature of business. While such unique processes/features can be a small part of the overall solution, yet they are very critical and are the 'show-stopper needs' to manage a business.

Panicker agrees and says that he also opted for TruePOS precisely for the same reasons: "Some important features for a publishing industry, like handling issue dates, postal order expiries, stock allocations based on customer quantum, etc, were not available with other POS solutions. This was one of the motivating reasons for choosing TruePOS."

Besides, as the business grows in the current environment, the business management solution needs to evolve to address additional unique requirements, which will give the business an edge over its competition. For this reason, most businesses prefer a vendor who is continuously improving the product in tune to the markets' needs and the specific customer's demands, he adds.

So, considering the kind of visibility and control over a retail business that a solution such as TruePOS can offer, it certainly seems worthwhile to explore and test run the solution. Consider taking the plunge only if it matches your requirements. While the POS solution may come at a price, the peace of mind that you will experience after achieving business transparency can prove to be the biggest ROI on this investment. ●●