

Office Machines Dealer Grows With POS Sales

This VAR is adding new customers as a result of its successful POS (point of sale) installation in a baseball stadium.

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In the competitive world of restaurant POS systems, VARs are always looking for an edge they can use to increase sales. Compton Office Machine Company (Compton) recently demonstrated how to win business using creativity with a POS installation. Compton is a great example of a traditional office machines dealer that is crossing technologies to sell and support POS equipment.

Appalachian Power Park is a new ballpark that serves as the home of the WV Power, a Class A minor league baseball club. The park owners had little experience with installing POS equipment in a new stadium. They learned about Compton through mutual acquaintances and contacted Compton for a POS proposal. Soon after contacting Compton, project overruns caused the budget to be trimmed in all areas, including the hospitality POS equipment.

Use RS-232 Converters To Win POS Deals

Compton proposed 19 Sharp ER-A420 cash registers connected to 2-port and 4-port LAVA Ether-Serial RS-232-DB9 links throughout the concession areas and in the stadium gift shop. Competitors proposed more expensive cash registers with Ethernet connectivity. "The LAVA links convert the electronic signal from serial RS-232 to Ethernet, allowing RS-232-based cash registers to be used on the existing Ethernet cable," explains George Cooper, senior programmer for Compton.

Compton was awarded the contract because the \$25,000 solution was considerably less than those of its competition. The lower cost was partly due to the fact that the LAVA converters allowed Compton to use serially attached Sharp cash registers, as opposed to TCP/IP (an open computer communications language)-based cash registers that were approximately \$1,000 per register more. The design of the POS solution saved the client approximately \$19,000 in cash register costs alone. Dan Buzzard, POS/PC service manager for Compton, says that price was important to the customer, but it was Compton's thoroughness during the quoting process that secured the business.

Crossing Technologies Requires New Skill Sets

One of the biggest challenges for Compton has been improving the skill sets of its employees. Installing networking technologies requires a different skill level than is required to install traditional office equipment such as analog copiers. Education has taken place mostly in-house, with the help of vendors such as LAVA, PC/POLL SYSTEMS, and Sharp.

At Appalachian, Compton interfaced the registers to a single PC running PC/POLL SYSTEMS software. PC/POLL SYSTEMS provides item maintenance and reporting modules capable of retrieving and sending data to the registers located throughout the stadium. The LAVA links are located wherever cash registers are located. The central PC addresses each port on the LAVA link as another serial port, allowing a single PC to connect to as many as 256 cash registers simultaneously, using the Ethernet infrastructure. Compton provided the PC/POLL SYSTEMS software and configured the entire system in about two weeks, including user training. There won't be much more POS business opportunity at Appalachian Power Park due to the physical limitations of the facility. However, Cooper indicated there might be some additional integration work as more PCs are added to the POS network.

Compton uses the success of this installation as a reference account for other POS installations. "We have closed at least four more deals as a result of the Appalachian installation," says Buzzard. "Many smaller businesses just don't need the power of an expensive TCP/IP-based cash register. By fulfilling the need for low-cost cash registers running on Ethernet cable, we have uncovered new opportunities."