Virtual reality

Why Retail IT's new POS software could be a worthwhile investment for indies

Retail software that lets businesses issue credit notes, print tags, sell gift vouchers, control stock and manage customers is a dream come true for most boutique owners. Unfortunately, however, expensive feature-rich retail software systems have been the exclusive domain of the big brands.

That is, until now.

Based in southwest London's Wimbledon, Retail IT has packaged a retail software solution aimed at smaller retailers that's both affordable and full of useful features.

Retail IT is the official UK partner for Yourcegid Retail software, used by some of the biggest stores in the country. "It's a great product and aimed at retailers of all sizes," says James Rodger, Retail IT's managing director. "But for independent retailers and boutiques it's just prohibitively costly. And smaller retailers just don't need every single feature it comes with."

With that in mind, Retail IT has created an independent retailer package for Yourcegid Retail. It's fully hosted by Retail IT and retailers rent the software on a monthly basis rather than making a one-off upfront payment. Plus it has a host of features that really appeal to niche retailers and boutiques.

"We have packaged the software like this because we wanted to offer small businesses the same benefits larger retailers enjoy," says Rodger. "Some of our customers might have one store now but they may have 10 in the future. We want to help retailers grow if that's what they want to do. And we want to allow our clients to focus on their customers – not spend all day on admin or looking at a computer."

So what do retail owners think of the software? Melanie Drake, who runs

her eponymous boutique in southwest London, started using the system last year and says she's never looked back. "Like most new business owners you try and keep your costs down," she says. "So when we first opened the store we would handwrite our invoices and tags and spend up to a week doing a stock take. So much of my time was spent on paperwork, spreadsheets and accounting. I knew I needed something better."

After carrying out a cost benefit analysis, Drake realised retail software could make a real difference to her business. And it wasn't even difficult to swap to a new system: "Once we'd uploaded all our data, it's been really easy to use and simple to add new stock," she explains. "We can see sell-through figures at a glance or if a particular brand keeps getting returned because there's a problem with the sizing or how it washes. By having specific data about a brand determines whether we buy it again or not."

She adds: "We know which brands or items are selling well and which sizes too. We know what day of the week we sell the most stock and even time of the day. We can also track weather conditions and events that affect footfall. This information means we can control our overheads and fine-tune our buying."

Many indies are finding the customer relationship management part of the software useful too. Favourite brands, sizes and colours can all be logged on the system as well as contact details such as email addresses and phone numbers. "It really helps us understand our customers," says Drake. "When we run styling evenings or other events we send invitations to the customers we know will be particularly interested based on what they've bought from us before."

The software also enables retailers to fully integrate in-store and website stock, with numbers refreshing every 20 minutes. And via the system it's simple to issue credit notes and gift vouchers or even make charitable donations.

"The software's pretty intuitive to use," says Rodger. "But we also offer training and follow-up training, plus our support team are always on the end of the phone."

"I'd recommend it, it's brilliant," adds Drake. "It's transformed the way we run our business. With data at our fingertips, we have the freedom to use our time for what's important – serving our customers." And how long does it take to carry out a stock take now? "Less than a day," she concludes.

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