

technology

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Point of Sale (POS) systems are much more than the paper and pencil recordkeeping of decades ago. The systems today offer computer programs that code and label every product, keep track of inventory, notify retailers when it's time to reorder, run hourly and daily reports, and maintain customer background information and previous purchases.

"I've heard that before," you're thinking, "but what's new?" We asked three marketing experts to weigh in on the upcoming advancements in their product lines.

1. How long has your company been in the POS system/software industry?

SBI: 9 years

Radiant: 24-plus years

J.D. Assoc.: 20 years

2. Do you supply only the garden center industry?

SBI: Yes, our software is designed specifically for the green industry—retail garden centers, wholesale growers and landscape distributors.

Radiant: No, we sell to any kind of retail industry including clothing stores, gift shops, sporting goods, museums, specialty food, and so on. Our product is very customizable, so [our POS system] CounterPoint has the ability to reach many markets.

J.D. Assoc.: We understand the business goals and needs of the garden center industry and have had great success in helping them meet those goals. We also work with retailers in other specialty retail verticals such as independent gift shops, sporting goods, apparel and many more. Although every installation is different, most retailers are more alike than different; they have many of the same business challenges.

3. What POS products do you offer to garden centers?

SBI: We offer a complete retail business management solution including counter sales and wireless sales and inventory, [which] gives retailers a mobile POS system in a durable handheld unit. Features include accounts payable, customer look-ups, inventory control, QuickBooks integration, tag printing, touch-screen sales, vendor SKU and UPC, plus 39 additional options.

Radiant: Our primary product is CounterPoint. The base system includes point of sale, inventory, customer tracking, purchasing, reporting and more. Options available from Radiant include the Offline feature with the ability to sell offsite, and the Receivables feature, which allows you to track customer house accounts and send statements. There are also add-on services such as CPOnline, which extends a garden center to the web to either sell products or make their inventory available to view online.

J.D. Assoc.: Most important, we offer 20 years of expertise. We bring that experience to every meeting and every software install to the benefit of the end user. Through the installation of POS software, hardware, training and support, we work with the buyers, managers and owners in the garden center industry to identify and realize their business goals. Our POS solutions can also work outside in their garden center yard. With our Mobile POS option, you can sell outside, eliminating long customer lines during peak selling and increase customer face time.

4. What are the improvements in your POS system for 2009-2010?

SBI: We believe that mobility with the handhelds is the future and this is a feature we are constantly improving with the help of our customers. Also, we are improving user-driven reporting to give garden center retailers the information they need to increase profits. Overall, we are looking to make the system as simple and user-friendly as possible without losing important functionality.

Radiant: We are adding margin-driven pricing, which will allow you to monitor and adjust your item prices to ensure that you are meeting your profit margin goals. Capabilities include adding an item target margin and comparing current prices to defined margins. Forecast-driven replenishment will systematically recommend minimum and maximum inventory levels based on demand forecasted from actual history, and give the merchant the ability to review and edit those recommendations. Enhancements to our Message Center will allow a message to be sent for later reading, and to unify the sending and receiving areas into a single window. In addition, the new Message Center includes many of the capabilities of traditional e-mail clients, such as an inbox view, which displays summary information for received messages, and a sent items view.

J.D. Assoc.: "Dot net technology" is being introduced in Q2. Once POS security measures are in place, management can access any of the stores' computers any time of day to view any information, such as total daily sales, register analysis reports, department sales and other information that is tracked and reported on through our POS solution. Customer loyalty programs continue to be developed based on individual stores' needs. If you know your customers' buying trends, then you'll never lose a sale and always have the right product on the shelf at the right time. There also is a formalized SDK (Software Development Kit) written for the product, which means the software product can be modified and adapted for individual retailers' needs. This way we can create a POS solution that fits like a glove. '

5. What operating system must a garden center use to run the POS system?

SBI: Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition (for the store's server) and Windows 2000 and above for the individual POS stations.

Radiant: Windows XP.

J.D. Assoc.: Both Vista and XP are supported systems, as well as Server 2008 and 2003.

6. What sets your system apart from other POS systems?

SBI: First, the collective needs of our customers are constantly driving improvements. Our system is dynamic and always changing with the times to reflect the newest technologies, while keeping things simple for our users. Second and perhaps most important is our support team—available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the SBI team speaks our customers' "language."

Radiant: Radiant not only develops the software, we also manufacture retail specific touch-screen terminals so we can provide the complete solution. The resources we offer set us apart: We have an annual user conference; we host a user forum on our website so our merchants can talk to each other; we have training tutorials and webinars for ongoing education; and we sell through local partners, so the store has someone in its community to help them.

J.D. Assoc.: When a retailer purchases a system from us, they are buying J.D. Associates as much as the software. We support them through the entire ramp-up process because with anything new, there's a learning curve. With the right company, the right trainer, the right support and the right POS software, the software becomes the dashboard for managers, buyers and business owners to make swift, business-critical decisions that immediately impact the garden center in a positive way.

7. What is the cost comparison between your product and other POS systems?

SBI: Somewhere in the middle, a little toward the higher end. One of our biggest hurdles is helping people realize that business management software is an investment (like a new tractor or water irrigation system) and not a cost. We offer excellent financing options.

Radiant: We are very competitive in the mid-range.

J.D. Assoc.: We have more than one POS solution for garden centers, so we have a solution that typically meets most garden center budgets.

8. How many garden centers use your POS products?

SBI: More than 100 garden centers nationwide and in Canada. We are looking to expand internationally, specifically in Australia, England and Ireland.

Radiant: More than 400 in the U.S., Canada and the Caribbean.

J.D. Assoc.: We sell and service retailers throughout North America. We have nearly 500 separate retail businesses; of those clients, nearly 18 garden centers use our POS software solutions.

DOVE Fights Off Cybercrime

Member florists of Teleflora can assure their customers' credit card information is secure and encrypted. Its DOVE POS system received PA-DSS (Payment Applications Data Security Standard) validation, making it the first floral industry point-of-sale application to be in compliance with the Payment Card Industry Standard Security Councils (PCI SSC) Payment Application Data Security Standard (PA-DSS) program.

“We understand that technology is critical to increasing the profit of our florists’ businesses, but we also know that the stealing of credit card data is a growing trend in the world of cybercrime,” says Jim Talarico, vice president, Teleflora Florist Technology in a recent press release.