



POS Systems

Mobile Solutions and More

College bookstore point-of-sale (POS) systems provide numerous applications that they need to remain viable. This includes handling transactions, tracking textbook rentals and returns, providing e-commerce platforms and much more.

More than a decade after being introduced in college stores, POS systems have evolved from the standard registers where students stand on line to make a purchase or rent a textbook.

Now, bookstores are bringing checkout to the customers by going mobile, processing transactions with a device that fits in the palm of your hand.

College Store Executive takes a look at some of the newest mobile POS applications on the market, as well as updates on current POS systems that have made improvements to the services they provide for stores.

uct," Rempe said.

Developed in conjunction with third party Hothand Inc., WebPRISM Mobile had been in the works for about a year. "One of the key factors in partnering with Hothand was their understating of the college market and their superior mobile technology," Rempe said. "For example, Hothand grants us the ability to detect the specific mobile device attempting to view the store's site and adjust the interface

A Mobile Approach to Retail

Nebraska Book Company (NBC) recently launched a series of mobile products, including NBC WebPRISM Mobile, NBC WebPRISM SMS and the iPhone-based NBC Mobile Buyback at Campus Market Expo (CA-MEX) 2011 in Houston, Texas.

The mobile applications are designed to offer college bookstores a more dynamic mobile strategy and competitive edge in the marketplace.

"In software development, it's critical to understand the needs of your audience," said Nate Rempe, senior vice president and chief technology officer, Nebraska Book Company. "In most cases, NBC has two audiences for our software products — the end consumer and the bookstore — and the mobile space is certainly no exception. Our mobile products are designed to meet the needs of both; making it easy for bookstores to engage students, parents, faculty and alumni in as many ways and through as many channels as possible."

NBC Mobile POS and Mobile Buyback are products used by the bookstore itself. "Using mobile technology, stores can nontraditionally assist students with purchasing or accessing information about its products and services," Rempe noted.

These mobile applications, he added, allow stores to move outside of their brick-and-mortar establishment, or even move freely within the brick-and-mortar establishment and help them better service their customers.

"For both students and stores, mobile technology allows for a new approach to retailing," Rempe said. "This can play dramatically into the hands of the bookstore, as it relates to communicating with customers as they're on the move."

WEBPRISM MOBILE

Rempe explained that the key to WebPRISM Mobile is to provide a cost-effective turnkey website product to the college bookstore industry.

"There are certain traits about a bookstore that are important to understand when providing it technology," he said. "Solutions must be low maintenance, cost effective and highly integrated into the business process."

One of the primary requirements for WebPRISM Mobile was a "flip-the-switch" approach that integrated tightly to the back office. Stores must be able to concentrate on running day-to-day operations. "WebPRISM Mobile is very much a "flip-the-switch and forget" type of prod-



to produce the best mobile shopping experience possible," he said.

He noted that the mobile version of the website is extremely fast and easily navigable on a reduced screen size. "It expands the reach of the store, making it more convenient and efficient for students to shop anytime, anywhere," he said.

Among the differences between the store's standard website and the mobile version of the site is that the mobile version will feature a standard product image that is sized down and its dimensions adjusted to be better suited for a mobile device.

In addition, menus on the mobile version are displayed in a vertical list format. Content on the mobile version features more summary-based information, as opposed to long paragraphs of text.

"If you're looking for a buyback price on your textbook, you're going to click 'Textbooks,' then 'Sell Textbooks,' put in your ISBN number and get the price," Rempe said. "It's really just that simple — the fewest steps possible to get the information."

Stores can have mobile websites launched through WebPRISM Mobile within 24-48 hours, Rempe said. "All we need from stores is their preference on what they want the mobile site to do," he said. "Do they want to offer buyback? Do they want to offer pre-orders? Do they want students to be able to browse merchandise?"

Stores can also customize certain elements of WebPRISM Mobile, including colors, header images and text.

He added, "WebPRISM Mobile is an extension of their store website. Put simply, it's time stores provide customers a website that is functional on a mobile phone."

WEBPRISM SMS

WebPRISM SMS extends a store's buyback pricing to text messaging, Rempe noted.

From their mobile phone, students send a text message with a keyword, such as "buyback," followed by the ISBN for which they want a price. WebPRISM SMS quickly responds with a text message that provides the buyback price.

"The students feel like the store is directly communicating with them, via a medium that is familiar and comfortable — texting," Rempe said.

MONTHLY COSTS

The WebPRISM SMS application is \$25/month with unlimited text messaging. For WebPRISM Mobile, there is no setup fee for the first six months, and stores only pay a monthly maintenance fee of 25 percent of their current WebPRISM fees. For example, if a store pays \$100/month for WebPRISM, it pays \$25 on top of that for WebPRISM Mobile, a total monthly charge of \$125.

FEEDBACK

Rempe noted that store personnel are excited about how easy it is to set up WebPRISM Mobile and WebPRISM SMS.

"As a bookstore manager, how do you even begin to get your store into the mobile game?" he said. "With NBC's mobile technology, it's practically zero additional effort. Stores don't have to do anything more outside of what they're already doing."

MOBILE BUYBACK

Another mobile application that NBC recently launched is Mobile Buyback, which is an iPhone app.

The Mobile Buyback application allows a store to operate buyback outside of the physical store, complete with instant payment and reconciliation capabilities.

Store employees download the application and they register with Nebraska Book Co. as a certified mobile buyer. The buyers sign up for the program through NBC, and they are provided with unloaded prepaid debit cards.

Buyers visit the students in their dorms or fraternity houses and scan the ISBN number on their books by using the camera on their phone. The phone will then hit the store's buyback list, or NBC's wholesale guide, and present the buyback price to the student. Once the students receive pricing for all their books, the mobile buyers scan the unloaded prepaid debit card and instantly load the card with the funds. They then hand the card to the student and take the books back to the bookstore.

Students immediately receive a text message from MasterCard letting them know that funds have been loaded to the card, indicating

the last four digits of the debit card.

"It allows the bookstore buyer to move outside of the store to do buyback where the students live," Rempe explained. "It completely revolutionizes the buyback process."

MOBILE POS

Mobile POS is made up of two concepts — enhancing service for students on the floor of a bookstore, and for stores, being able to check students out right on the sales floor and giving them information about product availability.

The Mobile POS device is iPhone based and features a thermal printer, scanner and card swipe built into the device. Employees scan the product and the device then gains access to inventory and pricing. It will present the price, the credit or debit card is swiped and students sign with their finger on the iPhone screen. Receipts are printed out right on the spot.

Rempe noted that Mobile POS enables stores to expand their capabilities without having to buy expensive register hardware, and helps cut down the size of lines at the register, especially during rush. In addition, store personnel can take their Mobile POS devices to remote locations, such as sporting events, to sell merchandise in front of the stadium.

"It's important for bookstores to give the perception they are service based," Rempe said. "Students realize the value that they bring to the table is convenience and easy access to products. Mobile POS fits into that vein — getting students in and out with high-quality service and fast transactions using cutting-edge technology. That goes a long way when measuring the viability of the bookstore, long term."



Upgraded Logi-Text System — A User-Friendly POS Option

An updated version of the Logi-Text College Store Management System, powered by South Eastern Book Co., was scheduled for release on April 4, giving bookstores a more complete, user-friendly option for their point-of-sale (POS) system needs.

Colleen Holland, director of Logi-Text system sales and support, South Eastern Book Co., explained that one of the major changes in the upgraded Logi-Text system is that the software was rewritten in Microsoft's .NET Framework, which makes the POS system "more user friendly" from the standpoint of things that customers can do.

"It is also much easier for our programming staff to support that," she noted. "It's a lot more flexible than what we used previously. As we continue to grow the system and make changes, we believe the change to .NET will be a huge benefit to everyone involved at every level from the design team to end user."

MORE FEATURES

Another user-friendly feature in the latest version of Logi-Text is that the POS system is completely touchscreen-capable at every level, should customers want to use it that way.

The upgraded Logi-Text system features a fully functional customer loyalty program, so that the end user completely controls it.

"You can offer one point for each dollar spent on specific items and/or item types, or you can reward a point and a half or two points; however you want to reward your students, we are there to support that style," Holland explained. "For example, if I spend \$100 on a textbook, I get 100 points.

"You can also increase the points on other items you're trying to promote. You control that, and you can change it at will. Every customer's loyalty card is swiped, the points are maintained and the receipt will reflect the loyalty points. It's just all so simple."

She noted that loyalty points do not have to be offered on every item; points can be offered on specific items. "It is completely controlled at the customer level."

LogiText's inventory program for multiple stores is easy, Holland noted, because "we have created the functionality, at the click of a button, to move items from one store to another. This generates a report that can be used as a packing list."

She added that all of that information is then available as a visual report on screen, or can be printed out for documentation purposes.

BENEFITS

The newest version of Logi-Text offers benefits to stores, students and South Eastern Book itself.

"From the store standpoint, this new version has such a modernized look, which ap-

peals to the stores as users and operators," Holland pointed out. "From the students' standpoint, it's so much faster because of the POS system's touchscreen capability, as well as the increased speed that makes checkout much faster, reducing the time that students have to stand in line for sales, buyback or whatever reason. It's just a faster system."

It is also a benefit to South Eastern Book Co. because as technology changes, "we feel, as a company, that it's important that we change too and keep our customers current in what they have, so that they're not using outdated technology," she said. "It's important that they change in order to keep their store as current as possible."

In regard to textbook rentals, Logi-Text features a rental module that allows multiple types of rental options, such as by the hour, by the day or by the term. "It's just very flexible, giving stores the opportunity to capitalize on a lot of different student needs," Holland noted. "With the rental market being so volatile right now, we felt like that was important to focus on. We tried to put in as many features, bells and whistles that we could and still keep it a simple process."

She noted that it was exciting to take the previous version of Logi-Text and say, "Oh, I always wanted it to do this, and now it does. It's a really exciting time from our perspective to be able to just say, 'We'll just put in everything that everyone has ever asked for and push it all out there."

"It does show that South Eastern Book Co. is a cutting-edge competitor, and that we have addressed every customer need from every angle. Our focus is on trying to give our customers everything they want."

Another benefit of the upgraded Logi-Text system is that training time for stores is going to be very minimal, which is a huge plus because they are getting a new product with very little down time involved. In addition, South Eastern Book Co. has lowered the price of the upgraded system, compared with the previous version of Logi-Text.

Perhaps the biggest benefit that the newest version of Logi-Text provides is the customization aspect. "If you are an owner of a Logi-Text system, you have input into the customization of that," Holland explained. "If we're not capturing something or listing something on a report that you need, we'll customize it.

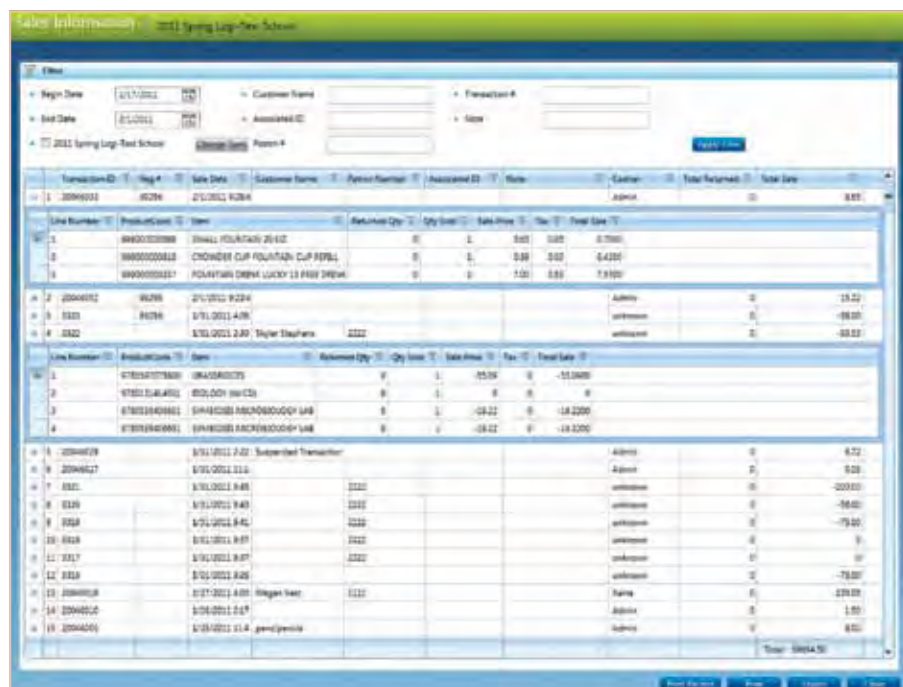
"It's your store. The system should enhance how your store operates, not control how your store operates."

ROLLOUT PROCESS

The Logi-Text upgrade process took about a year, with beta testing taking place over a six-month period. Holland noted that the latest version of Logi-Text came through the beta process "with flying colors."

In February, during Campus Market Expo (CAMEX) 2011 in Houston, Texas, a number of South Eastern Book's current customers signed up for installation of the upgraded Logi-Text system. Holland noted that the goal is for all stores that South Eastern Book Co. services to sign up for the newest version over the next 18 months.

"South Eastern Book Co. anticipates that customers will be as happy with Logi-Text in their store as we are as the provider," Holland stated.



Going Mobile With POS

MBS Textbook Exchange Inc., a wholesale textbook distribution company, has introduced the latest addition to its POS family of products with MBS iTouch POS, a more user-friendly, familiar and engaging purchase experience for the customer.

Jeff Miller, director of systems sales, MBS Textbook Exchange, Inc., explained that the concept of MBS iTouch POS came from feedback received from the company's Systems Advisory Council, about a year and a half ago, requesting better technology focused on mobility.

In October 2010, MBS announced the launch of the MBS iTouch POS device, and its interface with the MBS POS system. "It's an extension of the current MBS POS system," he said.

HOW IT WORKS

MBS iTouch POS is an iPod-based device — not much bigger than an iPod touch — that fits into a cradle, or sled. This sled integrates the scanner and magnetic stripe reader onto a handheld device.

Miller noted that the device has the full functionality of a register because it has a magnetic stripe reader and a scanner. He anticipates that students will pay more frequently by credit or debit card on the device, but cash is also accepted as a form of payment on these devices. Gift cards, student financial aid and campus debit cards are also accepted as methods of payment on MBS iTouch POS systems.

Upon receiving store feedback, Miller said that one of the major benefits of this mobile solution is the line busting it provides for stu-

dents who do not want to wait on long lines, especially during rush.

"At rush time, students are standing on line, and staff members can go to them and check them out in the middle of the line," he explained. "The employees can scan all the items in their basket or that they're carrying, and then print out a small receipt from a wireless remote printer they wear on their belt."

Sales using MBS iTouch POS terminals can be pointed to the store server, or recorded separately as mobile sales. In addition, the mobile devices can be taken by store personnel to record sales transactions at different events on campus, such as graduation ceremonies or sporting events, creating a "little mobile store," Miller said.

MBS iTouch POS systems are multi-function mobile devices. In addition to processing transactions, they can handle applications such as textbook rentals, buyback, price checking, e-commerce, item management, receiving, inventory and more. "Accessing all those different applications with one device is a great benefit for the store," he noted.

ADVANTAGES

The MBS iTouch POS system offers a significant cost savings to the stores, compared with the legacy mobile applications and mobile devices that MBS previously provided for stores, Miller noted.

Currently, the mobile application is installed in an estimated 20 stores that MBS services, and thus far, feedback has been "great," Miller said. "It is what our customers asked us for, as far as mobility and bringing it to market quickly."

With the release of MBS iTouch POS, it gives MBS the ability to have a platform to continue development of more POS solutions. "We expect to do even more things, both for the general public and customized types of things that might be unique to certain stores," he noted.

In addition to line busting, another advantage of the mobile POS device is that it improves the experience of shopping in the store, and provides students with more access to the store.

Miller pointed out that it also gives stores "the ability to capture that student outside the four walls of the store and service them in other places, in order to become a more prevalent retailer on campus."

EVENT POS

MBS launched another POS solution, Event POS, in October. This system provides a full POS solution deployed on a hardened tablet PC provided by a third-party manufacturer of these PCs designed for retail applications.

"It becomes a mobile store all on its own; it runs our POS server, as well as our iTouch POS application, all on the same device," Miller explained. "The iTouch POS devices can operate as terminals off of the Event POS. It really does become a store that you can pack in your briefcase and head out with it."

A magnetic stripe reader and scanner are attached to the Event POS device to give it full checkout capabilities. Miller noted that it features the same application as the traditional POS terminals, so there is no additional training needed.

The major advantage of Event POS is its mobility. "This is full POS at any location," he explained. "Credit card sales can be processed immediately on the spot."

Miller added that Event POS does not replace the traditional land-based POS system, but "it does extend the store out into the community further, and gives them flexibility to go to places they haven't been able to go in the past."

—CSE



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