



Choosing a POS dealer

The critical nature of a POS system makes choosing a POS dealer a big decision - bigger in many ways than the actual hardware and software choices. Price is an issue, but in many cases you get what you pay for, so it is worth doing your research before committing to a POS dealer. Here are some ways to make sure that your POS dealer is dedicated to and capable of supporting your business through any problems you might have.

Support

Customer support is critical to the success of a POS installation. Make sure you know exactly what your POS dealer provides in terms of response times, replacement policies, and telephone support. This is the single most important aspect of a POS purchasing decision.

Installation

The quality of a POS installation can have lasting effects on your business. Qualified installers will not take a standardized approach to installation: they will analyze your needs, test your existing infrastructure, and make sure you get a system that is customized to your location and business needs. The first week or two of using a POS system will determine whether it flies or flops, so a well-tested installation is essential. Ask how often the POS dealer will be on site during and after your launch - only until the system is running, or will they come back to check in and answer the inevitable questions that arise?

Experience

As with any major business purchase, a potential vendors' experience in the industry is also important. However, with POS systems you can go one step further: investigate how much experience the vendor has in supplying systems to other companies in your line of business. Dry cleaners have different needs than liquor stores, and a self-service cafeteria varies considerably from a sit-down sushi restaurant. Good POS salespeople will ask you about your business, find out what your particular needs are, and then provide a solution that is appropriate for you.

Facilities



Visiting POS dealers' facilities can be a great way to get a sense of their operation. You will be able to check out their repair shop and get a sense of how busy they are. You may want to ask for an organizational chart or a tour of their help desk.

Demonstrations

Nothing will give you a better sense of how easy a system is to use than trying it yourself. Some vendors do on-site demos, which gives you the added advantage of being able to see how the hardware looks in your location. Others will invite you to try the system in their office, which gives you that facilities tour we discussed. Either way, an in-person demo is strongly recommended if you are unfamiliar with POS systems.

References

Another familiar way to investigate POS dealers for your business is to ask for references to other customers - make sure to ask for references that are in business similar to yours. Of course, you will be referred to the vendor's most satisfied customers, but you can still learn quite a bit from them. Here are some sample questions to ask the references:

- How has the POS system influenced your business?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- Have you needed any support or repairs? How did the vendor respond?
- Do you know of any one else who uses this system? This can get you additional references to speak to, some of whom might be more candid.
- If you had to say one negative thing about the system/dealer, what would it be?

Do not be afraid to ask for a reference that dislikes the dealer, as well. Every business has dissatisfied customers from time to time, and you can certainly learn from them.

Return policies

Most manufacturers offers warranties that will enable you to get repairs or replacements for any equipment failures, but returning equipment is more difficult. Many POS dealers charge hefty restocking fees, \$500 and up, for returns on complete systems; some vendors may allow you to exchange individual pieces of hardware for others, but some may not accept returns at all. Again, make sure you understand these policies before you sign a contract.

