

REAL-TIME POS SLASHES CREDIT CARD PROCESSING TIME



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INTEGRATING ELECTRONIC CASH REGISTERS WITH AN ONLINE PORTAL ELIMINATED LONG LINES AT CONCESSION STANDS AND REDUCED PRODUCT WASTE BY ALMOST 100 PERCENT AT THIS BALLPARK.

By Cindy Dubin, Contributor

In baseball, timing is everything — from hitting the ball at just the right moment to tagging a player trying to steal a base. Off the field, time is equally valuable to the team's front-office staff, and sometimes there is very little of it, as Tom Fremarek can attest.

Taking over as Director of Food and Beverage for the Joliet Slammers minor league baseball team in March 2014, Fremarek managed to select and install a real-time point of sale (POS) system in only 11 days — just in time for the first pitch on opening day.

"When I took over food service, I wanted to address customer service issues we experienced during the previous season, and found that our manual registers and credit card machines did not allow us to achieve 100 percent customer satisfaction," he explains. "Our customer service issues were time-related in that slow credit card processing resulted in long customer lines at concession stands. Often, it took 45 seconds to process one credit card transaction because the card had to be swiped on a stand-alone credit card terminal and the amount manually entered into the cash register. Customers don't want to have to wait that long when they should be back in their seats watching the game."

In addition to customer frustration, the front office was aggravated by the manual system. Other than tabulating how much money was made at the end of the night, the stand-alone registers and credit card terminals were not connected to an online database, so food-service personnel could not track which items sold and which did not.

So, Fremarek began his search for new registers that would provide faster credit card processing, enable detailed inventory tracking, and offer Internet connectivity.

Two-Second Credit Card Processing

Fremarek looked at a few touch screen systems, but was concerned about their durability. "We get bad weather here in Chicago, and I was worried the touch screens might not withstand the harsh conditions and may be susceptible to spills that can occur at the concession stands," he says. In addition,

some of these companies charged annual subscription rates to use their software.

As another option, Fremarek contacted Advanced Data Systems (ADS), a Chicago-based VAR that he had done business with in the past. "ADS came in with a Sterling Payment Technologies solution that could process a credit card in less than four seconds," he says.

Ultimately, the Slammers invested close to \$25,000 to have ADS install 20 Samsung Sam4s ER 900 electronic cash registers and the Sterling Bridge Business Intelligence™ system, an online Web portal that allows merchants to access real-time sales data and view and print a variety of sales reports. The Bridge system also enables merchants to manage their cash registers from an Internet-connected PC or tablet, including updating multiple registers simultaneously and adding, changing, and deleting prices and PLUs.



Merchants can manage their cash registers from an Internet-connected computer, tablet or smartphone, including adding, changing, and deleting prices and PLUs.

The registers are connected to eight mBox™ wireless credit card modems that allow up to four cash registers to upload all sales data to Bridge via either a wired or, in this case, a cellular connection.

"Due to the size of the stadium, wiring the facility to a traditional network was not an option," says Jim Stewart, president of ADS. "Instead, mBox units were positioned at each stand. Using a cellular signal, credit cards are processed, and near real-time financial information is sent to the Bridge reporting portal."

The registers were installed in a gift shop, seven concession stands, and on a permanent grill cart. Some manual registers still remain on portable food carts around the ballpark. And, the "hawkers" selling food in the seats continue to operate cash only. Fremarek did reduce the total number of registers in use by three.

Three ADS technicians spent eight hours installing the system at the ballpark. Stewart explains that ADS created a video for the food service staff that described how to operate the registers and use the Web-based portal. ADS was on-site for the first three games. And, Sterling worked with Fremarek to tailor the solution to his needs. For instance, cash-paying cus-

tomers don't typically require transaction receipts, so receipts are only printed for credit card transactions, which keeps the customer lines moving more quickly. Additionally, some ticket purchases include food vouchers, so a key was added to the registers for voucher purchases.

"Getting all of this accomplished in an aggressive time frame was a challenge, but we came in with a week to spare," says Stewart.

Per-Person Spending Is Tracked

Having played just 5 of 54 home games, Fremarek says the team is already realizing benefits from the new system. At the end of the night, the register receipts from the remaining manual registers and the hawkers' sales are input into the grill cart's register to obtain one complete sales total. "So, if a beer hawker sold \$500 worth of beer, I enter \$500 open liquor on the register and that information is uploaded to Bridge and shows up on our financial totals page," Fremarek explains.

Fremarek uses Bridge to break down sales in a variety of ways, such as by customer. The ballpark can hold a little more than 6,000 fans. Fremarek can see how much each fan spends at the concession stand and what exactly they are purchasing. "Bridge showed us that our pretzel bits weren't selling, so we tried a different marketing technique, and now they are selling quite well. By knowing what is selling, we can be sure to put more of that at our stands, which brings in more revenue."

Fremarek also uses the system to create Probability Accounting Reports (PAR) sheets for his chefs. At the end of each evening, he reviews the sales numbers within Bridge and breaks these numbers into percentages based on attendance numbers. He knows for every 1,000 fans, on average, how many hot dogs will sell, and this information helps the chefs prepare food in advance. He also breaks down the information hour-

ly to determine what percentage of business is done at what time during the game so that the chefs know how much product to have ready at each hour.

"Having this breakdown of information has really cut our food waste," he says. "Using the PAR chart, we went from over-preparing and wasting close to 200 hot dogs per night to just recently only wasting one hot dog at the end of a game."

While Bridge is providing accurate data, Fremarek admits there are aspects of the system that he isn't taking advantage of yet. For example, Bridge can update inventory online and send real-time sales updates directly to his cell phone. "By receiving real-time PLU reports, I could see when a concession stand runs out of hot dogs and have some sent over immediately," he says. He is also considering putting a tablet or laptop with WiFi connection in the kitchen for the chefs to receive this information as well.

And next year, Fremarek expects that he and his chefs will review this season's Bridge data and use that information to make projections about food and concessions for opening day 2015.

We are still getting our feet wet with this system, but when I took over this post three months ago, I wanted to attain 100 percent customer satisfaction at the ballpark," he says.



Silver Cross Field, home of the Joliet Slammers minor league baseball team.

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Sterling is one of the most customer-focused payment processors in the industry, recognized for bringing the latest payment technologies to all types of businesses, quickly and affordably. Sterling offers a complete range of payment services, including credit, debit, PIN debit, fleet, gift card, and EBT. Sterling's 13-year focus on payment integration has made it a market leader in combining point of sale (POS) technology and value-added business benefits, including custom integrations, high speed wireless connectivity and online management tools, to provide merchants with the industry's most innovative payment solutions. These include mobile payments, unique financing products for POS purchase, and cloud based POS sales reporting such as the proprietary Bridge Business Intelligence™ platform. Today, Sterling has connectivity to more than 1,000 different POS systems, including proprietary technology and middleware for numerous POS applications in hospitals, restaurants, retail, medical, automotive, and business-to-business management systems. For additional details about Sterling's products and services, visit www.SterlingPayment.com

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