

## What's New, Coming Up in Point-of-sale Systems

09/17/09

Point-of-Sale systems are not just for keeping track of sales and inventory anymore. Software manufacturers continue to program POS systems with new features that assist pond and water garden retailers like never before.

Wireless handheld scanners prove pricey but worth it, with more affordable versions on the horizon, said some pond and water garden retailers. For instance, cutting-edge POS software can send an e-mail reminder to customers, said Stephen Gallo Jr., sales manager for Integra Systems Inc. in Suffield, Conn. "It can tell customers that it's time to open their pond and to come by for new products," Gallo said.

The more advanced the technology gets, the more POS systems can do without owners pushing a button. Owners can set up some POS systems to produce a purchase order when a pond and water garden product runs low in inventory. "You're not ordering based on what's on the shelf," Gallo said.

It might sound fancy, but this only represents the beginning, said Corinne Kraft, a partner in RB Control Systems in North Versailles, Pa. "A POS system can set up a sales event in a matter of minutes," Kraft said. "It can set the start and end time in the system to adjust pricing, make sure there's enough merchandise in the store and print out signs to put on the product, all within an hour. It can even generate handout sheets."

Wayne Rodrigues, president of POS Solutions Inc. in Baltimore, Md., said he likes radio-frequency identification (RFID) labels that allow an item to be checked out like a "go card" instead of being scanned. A RFID unit contains much information that it transmits via radio frequency to the POS system, Rodrigues said.

Probably the most visible features for pond and water garden businesses are handheld wireless scanners. These help when a customer wants an item, such as a fountain, birdbath or fish, that is stored outside and cannot be moved easily to the cash register.

"You take the handheld with you to help the customer and scan items as they're buying," said Tim Flachman, founder of POS Nation in Charlotte, N.C. "It spits out a receipt they can take to the front to cash out."

Handheld scanners cost more than those attached to the POS systems, said Deb Spencer, co-owner of Water's Edge in Lawrence, Kan. She said they pay for themselves, but "be sure that your wireless network really works, because that can make a big difference in using them."

On the horizon is a new way to achieve the same results as a wireless handheld scanner for less money by using cell phones, especially iPhones, said Marc S. Want, executive vice president of marketing and development at Business Control Systems in Iselin, N.J. "Cell phones can take a picture of the barcode and even take a credit card, or you can be at a customer site and place an order," Want said. "Most handhelds aren't that rugged, but cell phones can take a beating. Wireless handhelds cost \$1,750 to \$5,000. For \$300, you can get a nice cell phone. That development is no more than 12 months away."

Cells phone might soon access POS systems remotely, Kraft said. "It will be be great for the business owner on the go," she said. "They can look in on operations when out of the office."

A POS system's abilities five years from now is anyone's guess," Spencer said. "Twenty years ago, we were fine to do handwritten receipts," Spencer said. "That's just no longer true."