

The Retail Management Advisors

Changing the Perspective of Your System Provider

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I recently conducted a sales training seminar for a software provider in your industry. It was my purpose to work with their sales representatives to teach them YOUR perspective of a system and develop salespeople that could help you arrive at the correct decision.

It is interesting the number of misconceptions that occur in a system search. For example, if you are reviewing point-of-sale and the first item in the demonstration is a split tender involving purchasing a gift certificate, returning merchandise, buying merchandise and deferred billing, your impression of ALL transactions will be that the POS system is cumbersome. This may or may not be accurate.

Traditional training of salespeople at software vendors can be described as "Training by Accident" and "Training by Osmosis". Accidental training can be described as putting the person in front of a computer, handing them the manual and telling them to learn it, then sell it. Training by osmosis involves having them observe a number of demonstrations, hoping it all sinks into the brain of the new salesperson.

If all that you view is a series of demonstrations from companies who train in this fashion, then your decision has become a "feature contest". Feature contents are basically a mathematical formula with a point value assigned to each feature relative to its importance. Once finished, a winner can be calculated. (In case of a tie, we go to rock, scissors, paper.)

A professional software vendor trains ALL of their staff to understand your business and solid retail business practices. Their staff will question you to determine your procedures and may define unrecognized weaknesses in your operation that are costing you money. After they understand your needs (whether you recognize all of them or not), THEN they give you a presentation designed to address those needs. You might not even see all of the features.

We have worked with software salespeople to help *them* better understand the procedural flow of your business, give demonstrations that address your needs and discuss real world examples from their customers that can help *you* make educated business decisions. A final step in their presentation would be to expand your horizons to new revenue sources or expense control. This method of analyzing needs and looking at solutions to those needs is a good approach for you to use to evaluate the capabilities of a system for your business.

Showing information (reviewing reports) for many traditional software salespeople involves showing you the header of their 1,000 page report listing every item in inventory and sales *ad nauseum*. A *professional salesperson* will be less interested in the headers of these reports and more interested in showing you how some of their customers have succeeded in their business by using this information.

If you are going to trade shows in the coming months, then you might take notice of those salespeople who try to "operate without a diagnosis" and avoid seeing a presentation of what *that salesperson* believes is important or flashy. You might be better off limiting how much time is devoted to the demonstration side as you visit with software vendors and concentrate on finding a company that can help you find solutions to problems.

As you prepare to go to trade shows hoping to identify your next system, take time (take a lot of time) to prepare to make the best decision you can. If you do not have the time, find someone to help, either from within the company or an objective outsider. If you need help, TRMA can provide it.