

# Retailers go mobile to instantly meet shoppers' needs

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The days of waiting in line to pay for merchandise may be coming to an end.

New [mobile technology](#) is making it easier for shoppers to make purchases quickly and without having to stand in a queue. Retail store employees can check out customers on a touch screen from any point inside a store and check supply stock without leaving the customer's side.

Retail stores like Nordstrom, Urban Outfitters and Macy's are among the many that equip employees with handheld register devices. The technology allows employees to swipe or scan credit cards, access the Internet and print receipts.

"We first saw this technology 10 years ago," said Richard Mader, the executive director of the Association for Retail Technology Standards. "It's something well beyond that now."

Of an estimated 10.2 million check-out terminals shipped last year, 25 percent used wireless connectivity such as Bluetooth, cellular or Wi-Fi, according to Craig Foster, senior analyst with ABI Research in Oyster Bay, N.Y.

"By 2016, we're forecasting that this will rise to over 30 percent," he said.

Apple was among the first of retail stores to move away from stationary point-of-sale stations to mobile ones starting in 2005. Many of these devices are now [iPod Touch](#) models made by Apple with point-of-sale software installed, Mader said.

Sue Shayler of Oakland Park, Fla., recently made a purchase at a Fort Lauderdale [Apple Store](#) without having to stand in line to pay at a cash register.

Instead, she paid an employee equipped with a mobile point-of-sale device.

"You are already working with a sales associate and they process your sale right there, no need to go to another terminal at another area of the store," Shayler said.

Nordstrom added Wi-Fi to all full-line stores across the country in November to set the stage for using mobile devices inside the stores. By July, the company had nearly 6,000 handheld devices capable of mobile check-out functionality inside stores.

At Macy's shoe department, employees are equipped with handheld devices so they can check for different sizes and colors without leaving a customer's side.

Hertz, a worldwide car rental company, has been using handheld and portable printing devices since the late 1980s, said spokeswoman Paula Rivera. The mobile systems handle the return of cars, closing out rental agreements and printing receipts.

"This process eliminated the need for the customer to physically go to a car rental return counter and stand in line to return their rental vehicle," Rivera said.

Mobile technology is eliminating lines outside of stores too.

Boca Raton, Fla., nightclub owner Tim Wells introduced a portable identification card scanner at his 21-and-up club, Spin, in May. Employees scan a driver's license at the front door of the club to check whether it's valid.

"It's better to use that than visually looking at the date on the I.D.," Wells said. "You swipe it like a credit card, and a screen pops up saying whether the license is expired or valid."

Wells said the lines to enter the club move much faster with the "swipe and go" technology. But investing in the devices was expensive. He paid nearly \$2,000 for each device.

Cellular-enabled check-out terminals are "quite a bit more expensive" than the wired alternative or one with Bluetooth or Wi-Fi connections, Foster said.

"I still think it's worth it," Wells said.

The future of mobile sales will be less expensive, Mader said.

"We're moving toward all-mobile. It's like a train," he said. "The future is in each shopper's phone."

Mader said some stores already allow registered shoppers to scan items on their cell phones through downloaded apps.

"You can walk in with your phone, scan the item to get more information, buy it right there and walk out with proof of purchase on your screen," he said.

Andrew Myones of Fort Lauderdale has made purchases from mobile point-of-sale devices and from his iPhone. He said he uses his Starbucks app, which allows him to pay for his coffee on his iPhone, regularly.

"If I could have everything on my phone, I would do it," Myones said. "It's just convenient to have your debit card and insurance card attached to my phone. With (computer file) backups, now it's easier to get the information back to your phone rather than waiting in line for a new card anyway."

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