

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

The Future is Now

Way back when, a long five years ago, walking the aisles at NAMM, I believe I saw one, maybe two iPads in use, and they were being held by people in their booths playing games. The next year was a different story altogether. The aisles were crawling with iPads. Zildjian had one built into their Gen 16 booth, sales reps took orders on them and everywhere you looked there was an app for this and that. As I watched a band play in the Marriott lobby I noticed the sound engineer standing across the room running the front of house console via his iPad.



NAMM always provides terrific courses and lots of ideas to take home, but that year it was the exhibitors integrating tech in new ways that gave me the best takeaways. I left California promising myself that when I touched down on the East Coast I was heading straight to the Apple store and putting iPads and technology to use in our shops.

Now jumping forward by a slight four years, I find that it's never been easier to integrate technology into your daily store activities, and the cost to do it is getting cheaper by the month. There are numerous developers putting out products that are specific to every industry and with a little training (or a tech savvy employee) you can develop your own custom apps for your business.

Here are five easy, low-cost ways to add tech to your business — and some thoughts on what the integration might mean for you.

1. iPads, Smartphones and Tablets

I've read in several publications and blogs that 2013 will mark the end of the desktop PC as we know it, and I believe that might be true.

I introduced iPads into our business a few years ago and watched the use of our desktop machines plummet. Our teachers use iPads in their lessons as a teaching tool to play videos, check schedules, receive messages from our front desk alerting them if they are running over or if their next student is waiting on them, and to write out assignments for students and send them via email before they even walk out of the door.

They use the built-in camera to film clips of the lessons — and email them to their students as a virtual archive. On the sales floor we have an iPad set up for customers to peruse inventory and make orders. They can even price compare if they like.

How about designing a “Tech Center” where you have music gear hooked up to an iPad to show how to use the product to its fullest extent? We are only seeing the tip of the iceberg as far as the many uses for a tablet in retail environments.

2. Point Of Sale Systems

Although we still use a desktop for our POS, those days are limited. My staff can answer the phone anywhere in our shop with a wireless handset — so why not make a sale anywhere in the shop? I'm already looking at various options to replace our stationary PC with a more streamlined, mobile system, and there are lots of options. I like Square (squareup.com), the payment platform developed by Jack Dorsey, a co-founder of Twitter. The software runs on both Android and iOS devices and it's free to sign up. Transaction fees are

still 2.75 percent, but you can ring a customer up on the spot (think Apple store) making your entire shop the check out area.



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Another option I'm looking at is the iPad based Shop Keep system (shopkeep.com/ipad-pos). I like it a lot since it does have some features not found on the Square platform, but I think the ability to use a POS system anywhere in our store is the clear winner for me. Overall, Shop Keep is definitely worth looking at if you want to start with a basic streamlining.

3. Transparency

With a Wi-Fi camera, your customers can see what's going on in your shop even if they are a thousand miles away. I've been experimenting with various uses of the Belkin NetCam (belkin.com) and so far it has been awesome. We can place the camera in our teaching rooms so par-

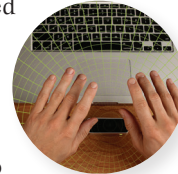
ents, grandparents or anybody with the Wi-Fi password can log in and watch the lessons, or we can use it for performances in our shops. Have grandparents in Hawaii that want to see their grandchild perform in their first piano recital in New York? Set up one of these babies and they can see it live.

Store owners can keep an eye on the till and watch the shop remotely. This type of setup used to cost thousands — and now it's at your fingertips for \$130!

4. Apps

It's hard to imagine our world without apps now. There are millions of them and I subscribe to several newsletters that send out a "Best Of" feed every Mon-

day that includes the Top 10 for iOS. I'm sure you can find something similar for Android based platforms. Of all the apps I've tried in the last six months I really like Vstrator (vstrator.com). Developed primarily to cater to athletes, Vstrator is a video analysis app complete with side by side screens, a video analysis tool and sharing options for Facebook and Twitter. With Vstrator you can film your students and use it to draw diagrams on the problem areas and correct any issues they may have with form and technique. I look at all types of apps, even the ones designed for another industry, and see if they have possible uses in my daily routine.



5. One For The Future

I'm not sure how I'm going to use this device yet, but I have a few ideas in mind for the Leap motion controller (leapmotion.com) in our teaching rooms. While I've looked into SmartBoards (smarttech.com/smartboard) I think the use of the Leap controller with a computer is amazing and has all kinds of potential.

I'll have to play with it when it arrives, but that's the beauty of the times we are living in. At only \$70 it's not something that will break my bank even if it does not find a niche in my shop's daily workings — but it could add a whole new level of "supercool" to my shop, and let us to be known as "The Most Future-Forward Thinkers In Music." **MI**



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