

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Help Yourself

It's still my belief that, once your customer walks through your door and introduces you to the latest and greatest apps and technologies, you are on the verge of obsolescence. The prospect of your competitor not being the brick-and-mortar down the road, but the consumers themselves, gets closer to reality every day.

These days, you've got to make the purchasing decision as easy as possible. Part of that is freeing yourself up to operate more efficiently on all fronts. By staying abreast not only of easier ways to communicate, but also of faster turnaround methods, speedier service models, and increased availability in our fast paced world, you offer convenience to your customers. Ironically enough, smoother customer interactions really begin with making things run smoothly for you and your staff. Here are few ways to do just that.

SuperCalendar: Imagine having a concierge to help manage and schedule your meetings, RSVP's, calls and anything else you put in your calendar in a work week. SuperCalendar does it.

Here's how it works. You sign up for an invite on their website (supercalendar.com) and in a week or so SuperCalendar connects you with a team of scheduling assistants. You then configure your preferences and email your personal assistant anything you want added to your calendar. There's no contract, it syncs easily with Google Calendar and at only \$89 a month it's cheaper than a part-time employee. When I tried it out I thought of the independent music teacher being able to utilize this for student bookings and recitals — or maybe even having a studio coordinator manage the lessons program.

WHMCS Business Automation: Wouldn't it be great to automate welcome emails to new music students, as well as billing and payment reminders? How about converting visitors to

your website into customers with various order form templates? You can do all of this and more with a custom backend from WHMCS (whmcs.com). Based in the U.K., WHMCS is actually geared towards Web hosts and developers, but the overall goal is to combine billing and support into a single package that end-users find easy to navigate. Your developer will need to implement

WHMCS's features into your site, unless you are a DIY type, but once you have it configured you will wonder how you made it all these years without the backend support.

Google: I know — with all the stuff flying around lately about security and how Google uses and stores your online information it can be a bit off-putting to put more of your particulars into the hands of this giant. But Google's business apps are some of the most powerful (and free) tools around. If you are the admin person for your account you can simply go under the "Manage This Domain" tab in your Gmail inbox and see a list of all the apps you can add. There are lots of tools that can work in your staff's favor (look under "Business Tools" at chrome.google.com).

My shop can't live without our Google Drive where we share documents and store our daily work logs. If a customer needs a follow-up, and the person they spoke with is off that day, any desk staff can look at the log and see what we need to do. This all connects to our Google Calendars and Gmail where everyone — teachers, desk staff and managers — has company email addresses.

As they should; certainly our customers are already there. **MI**

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