Revamped Store Technology

'm a bit old school. I still use my iPhone 4, original iPad (it makes a great recipe finder in my kitchen) and iPad 2. My Mac desktop that I'm writing this column on is getting ancient by today's standards at a mere four years old. But all of these devices still work for me, so I've seen no need to upgrade.

While I'm not personally a "tech junkie" at home, I do love to investigate how new gadgets will work in my stores and, as the pace of innovation increases every year, I'm always on alert for the better mouse trap. It seems when one company jumps into a segment, I can find three or four others that are releasing something to compete. For example, a few issues back I wrote about the Wi-Fi cameras I deployed in our teaching rooms. They were great, until a year later when I found another camera that is lightyears better — and $20 less. I wanted to revisit two product categories and introduce you to a third that I think is so important I'm making it central to my upcoming NAMM Idea Center session in January.

Dropcam (dropcam.com): A few years ago, I wrote about Belkin's $99 Wi-Fi Netcam after I placed several of them in our teaching rooms and around my shops. These are really great cameras and we still use them, but I've been playing around lately with the Dropcam. Both the Belkin and Dropcam are super easy to set up, but what I really like about Dropcam is the 720p video capability and the night vision. I set up a Dropcam to broadcast a piano teacher's recital, and the image was great, even with the minimal stage lighting and darker room. Plus, the Dropcam seems to have a better connection and load speed over our Wi-Fi.

Point of Sale Systems: The "Accept Payment Anywhere" movement was just emerging a few years ago when I wrote about the Square (squareup.com) system, which I had tried in my store. Since then the market category has exploded, and there's lots of companies jumping in. I've now experimented with not only Square, but **PayPal (paypal. com/webapps/mpp/credit-cardreader)**, and **Intuit's Service (gopayment.com)**, as well. We moved back to PayPal over Square and Intuit as my staff seemed to prefer the PayPal system. Other services include PayAnywhere (payanywhere.com), ROAMpay (roamdata.com) and Amazon's Local Register (localregister.amazon.com). All of these payment services offer easy set up, free card readers and rates that hover anywhere between 2.5–2.9-percent per transaction. Like I said a few years ago in my original article, it's awesome to be able to accept payments anywhere in the store and not be tied to a desk.

Beacons (estimote.com): Apple may have quietly rolled out its iBeacon technology, but it's quickly gaining popularity. This piece of hardware broadcasts a low-energy Bluetooth signal that identifies the beacon by your mobile device. The beacon sends out its signal, letting apps on the device pick up notifications whether the app is running or not, when the user gets within range of the beacon. You may set beacons to offer promotions through your store's own app and through other apps — much like social networking. For example, you can set up a beacon in your guitar department that sends a message that all strings are half price. You can also track how customers move around your store. If the customer picks up a demo guitar, the beacon then knows it's been moved and sends the notification to that person to visit a webpage for further information. This emerging technology shows potential for retailers and will be interesting to watch grow. **MI**
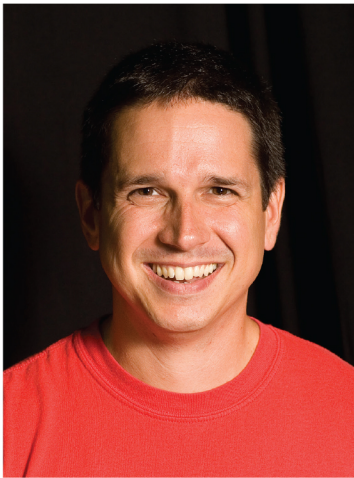
Revisiting past technologies that have gotten a reboot

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