

BUSINESS FEATURES OTC

POINTING OUT THE BENEFITS



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Getting your point of sale systems working most effectively can benefit your pharmacy on a number of different levels

It goes without saying that point of sale is the crux of a community pharmacy's operations. When pharmacies are considering how to revamp or revitalise their point of sale, they often focus on updating the technology, but is that all they should consider?

Many experts think it is just as important to consider the way your pharmacy approaches point of sale as a concept. Is it just about the sale itself, or is it an opportunity for counselling or discussion? Is it simply transactional? Or should it be an integral part of a friendly, health-focused experience?

Pharmacy business expert Glenn Guilfoyle says: "In my opinion, the POS at the front of store is often a lost opportunity to finish and 'gift wrap' the whole customer's 'wow' visit experience.

"As a generalisation, the industry is very good at the 'pleasantries' and customer acknowledgement. Any extensions beyond that usually are usually limited to an invitation to join the Loyalty Club," said Mr Guilfoyle, principal of The Next Level.

"Such invitations could also extend to script reminder services and any other initiatives on offer to drive customer 'stickiness',".

The right set up

To derive the most benefit for the pharmacy, and indeed to patients this 'wow' experience at point of sale, the store needs to be effectively set up to do this.

One thing that experts all agree on is that a lot of thought needs to go into how the pharmacy is configured, its workflows structured and its ethos refined, before commencing on a POS refitting.

Leading pharmacy transformation advocate Rob Sztar says his pharmacy aims to provide a version of the Apple store experience to give it the ‘wow’ factor.

“Increasing pharmacist interactions at POS is key, and this all comes down to workflow,” he says.

“You can talk about setting up program till the cows come home, but if the workflow doesn’t enable your pharmacists to be involved with patients in a meaningful way, then nothing is going to change.

Who do patients talk to first? Is it a pharmacist or an assistant? At what point in time is a pharmacist available in a space where they can meaningfully interact with a patient? These are the big questions pharmacies need to ask before beginning a point of sale refit or revamp.”

Mr Sztar, chief Transformation officer at Pharmacitve, advocates for ‘extreme forward pharmacy’.

“The pharmacist is present for the patient from the start to the finish of their visit. We have set up multiple counters, with multiple pharmacists to allow patients a choice and a chance to speak to a pharmacist regardless of which counter they choose to visit.

The type of retail experience I liken this to, is Apple—no in and out counter, no one single counter to which a patient has to go, rather we can meet you wherever you choose, you’ll meet the patient in a place of their choosing. It’s our role to cater for that experience and to provide tools to allow both a clinical interaction and a point of sale encounter to occur in the same spot.”

Award-winning pharmacist Elise Apolloni, co-owner of Capital Chemist Waniassa, ACT says she has seen many different techniques for point of sale.

“Some have multiple stations to use point of sale around the pharmacy. My personal preference, if space and work flow allows, is to separate the payment area from the dispensary and medicines area—mainly because we want to maximise privacy and pharmacist access, which may become difficult in a congested multi-purpose environment!

“That was certainly the case in our old shop refit, so our latest refit is much more considerate of the need to maximise health interactions.

“We complete a ‘point of sale induction checklist’ with every team member that commences work with us. It provides a list to prompt us to show the full functionality of the program.”

The software approach

While we’ve said POS is about more than just a software upgrade, the importance of having a suitable software system to suit your pharmacy is undeniably important.

Elise Apolloni says point of sale software can “enhance health interactions by providing reminders to team members about tips to share when providing various products.”

For example, she says if a decongestant nasal spray has been self-selected, it may provide a prompt to say “Remind of the requirement for short-term use only to avoid rebound nasal congestion—helpful, timely and maximises the benefit of the medicine to the patient, and the use of point of sale system.

“Data is significantly helpful in this space too. I know now as a mum, if I make a trip out to the shops, there is nothing more frustrating than getting home, after all the effort that went into going on that trip, to realising that you forgot something.



Elise Apolloni

“Pharmacy should be a place where health interactions lead to tailored healthcare solutions and advice for the intricate variety of health conditions, individual presentations and situations that we see and hear,” she says.

Ms Apolloni says point of sale systems allow pharmacists to measure their effectiveness as health professionals, and pharmacies as being one-stop, tailored care, health solutions.

“Did we ensure our patient understood the benefit of a balanced diet and potentially additional fibre if they are seeking treatment for constipation? Did we make sure our patient experiencing diarrhoea understands the benefits of electrolyte rehydration options?”

The list is endless in how we can make sure that our patients understand how they can best manage their health, and point of sale systems again provide access to data that we can use to make sure our teams are being helpful and connecting patients with the best advice possible.

“It isn’t about ‘basket size’, or ‘fries with that’—far from it. It is about actively listening and meeting the needs of our patients every time, so they don’t get home and feel our advice or interaction was incomplete or not individualised to their needs.”

The next steps

Glenn Guilfoyle says there are a number of (relatively simple) steps that pharmacies can implement to add value at point of sale, without a total revamp. These include:

- short, sharp customer satisfaction scores/surveys (perhaps even net promoter scores);
- customer research (e.g. what did you like about your visit today and what could we have done better?);
- KPI data collection (e.g. for script customers, did a pharmacist speak with you today?); and personal invitations to special events or health services on offer.

“Often the execution of these will only take a few extra seconds and, if need be, consigned to periods where there are no queues at the tills,” he says.

“We often under-appreciate the fact that customers generally like to be asked their ‘expert’ opinion, and therefore we don’t do it often enough”.

Rob Sztar supports this point, and takes issue with a staple of pharmacy practice which he thinks is central to the problems many have in maximising POS and patient outcome potential.

“We’re extremely fortunate to have maybe five minutes with patients, so the aim really is to have maximum interaction and minimum disruption and interruption of this process—customise workflow to better interact and not disrupt patients, don’t try to force them away.

“Which brings me to the point of why do we ask people if they have something else to do when they’re waiting for a script?

“Why push them away from you? What we’re doing is basically telling them that we want to look after your paper prescription but don’t want to look after them.

“That’s at the core of all this and I don’t know why we do this as an industry,” he says.

Train up on systems

So using your point of sale to gain analytical evidence for what you’re doing well or could do better is crucial to being able to further improve how your pharmacy operates.

“Point of sale systems which are maintained correctly, with regular stocktaking and data analysis also provide insights about loss of items due to theft, damage and other segregated causes to monitor store processes, as well as information about optimal rostering based on patient traffic,” says Elise Apolloni.

Rob Sztar says that from a technical level it’s important to have IT hardware capable of running all the requisite software, as well as things like barcode scanners, docket printers, cash drawers, other accessories to enable POS interaction

“So, this all plays into other elements—training, crime prevention, functionality—these can be built into the workflow and the physical work space. It allows the technology (central to our pharmacy transformation) to enable us to be better pharmacists, not the other way around.

“Those who do this well will thrive and maximise interactions with patients to provide a personalised experience.

“It’s not something that everyone can implement tomorrow, but you can start to see how the workflow can be improved, what kind of experience you want to create,” he adds.

See our Monday business column ‘The three P’s of POS’ for more on this topic

