Dma 2000
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HOW LONG WILL THE QUEUE BE ?

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In the modern retail environment queuing to pay is the norm, not the exception. Numerous surveys have highlighted this delay as the most frustrating that the customer experiences.

Retail outlets spend vast amounts on the stores ambiance, environment and product presentation. But after the decision to purchase has been made, how much thought is given to closure. This can be the only time the customer has direct contact with staff. Delay and confusion, paint a very negative corporate picture.

Some outlets try at this stage to sell additional service, store cards or insurance. To a customer who has been waiting 10 minutes this can be very aggravating and also totally non productive.

Queues will affect sales, how many customers take one look at its length and walk away, or worst, never enter the store again.

The need to control and monitor queuing time is critical, knowing what generates and drives the process, can be used to reduce the delays and optimise resources.

The Till process can in its simplest form be split into three main segments:

(a) Scanning or keying in the code or price.
(b) Payment.
(c) Removing tags, and bagging goods.

Each one of these elements in the process is controlled by a number of secondary factors. Lets look in detail at the secondary factors that effect payment.

In any normal outlet the customer can pay with cash, card or cheque, in addition store vouchers or discount vouchers can be used. The process time can vary tremendously by the payment method, the difference between cash and card payment can place an additional 60% onto the transaction time.

It is interesting to note that the average payment method changes in different regions of the country. In northern regions the percentage cash transactions increase, in southern regions the credit card dominates.

Age and social status also has an effect, the elderly tend towards cash, to find anyone paying with a cheque under 30 years old is nowadays very rare.

The seasons will also affect the payment method, in the run up to Christmas combination payments increase, such as card and cash, vouchers and cash. This change can dramatically delay the process. At this time inexperienced temporary staff are also introduced into the equation, with the additional combinations in payment methods, delays and confusion is inevitable. The run up to Christmas is when most retailers make up to 60% of their profits. Excessive delays while waiting to pay will have a marked effect on whether or not they achieve this.

Management need to understand all of the secondary factors that play a part in the Till process, these need to be itemised, measured, and monitored. Management needs information to simplify the process, small changes to the procedure can have major effects on the customers waiting time. These include, cash only tills, no secondary product or services sales, temporary staff trained to cope with multiple payment methods. Experienced staff must also be available to supervise the Till points, available to sort out problems immediately, leaving inexperienced staff merely to bag the merchandise.

All of the above will have a positive effect, but by far the most important factor is having the correct number of payment stations available and manned. Management need scientific methods of planning and modelling the customer flow under different conditions to obtain the correct balance between Till points and queue length.

Rules of thumb cannot be applied in this area as the goal posts are constantly changing. For example "chip and pin" will delay this process. Management needs to know precisely by how much if they are to provide the correct staffing levels in the future.

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dma2000 has helped retailers understand, measure, and model the payment process for over 25 years.
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