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An Apple Store buying experience at bike retailers

By Jason Norman

MONTREAL, Quebec—Do you ever walk into a bike shop and are blown away by the technology? Not the newest carbon fiber rig, but rather the way a salesperson completes your transaction? (Think Apple Store.)

Most likely your answer is no, but that might soon be changing as point-of-sale (POS) providers such as LightSpeed are now offering mobile solutions.

“Basically what they [Apple Stores] have and what we have is the same technology,” said Zack Brown, sales manager for LightSpeed. “They basically have an iPod Touch sort of acting as a mobile sales station, and the iPod Touch is outfitted with a piece of hardware that includes a bar code scanner and a credit card swipe, so you’re able to make the sale right on the shop floor.”

Launched in fall 2010, LightSpeed Mobile already has more than 20 retailers using it, including Freshbikes Cycling in Virginia and Maryland.

“I think everything’s going to be mobile. I don’t think we’re going to have desktops [in the future]. ... We’re trying to untether ourselves as much as possible.”

— **Scott McAhren**, owner of Freshbikes Cycling, on the use of the iPod Touch and other wireless devices for point-of-sale service

“It was just a no-brainer for us,” said Scott McAhren, owner of Freshbikes Cycling. “My background is that I had worked for REI for a number of years, and when we got mobile receiving there it was a game changer. I’ve always been thinking about not being tethered to the desktop.”

McAhren said this technology brings a certain “wow” factor into the store. “It’s like going into an Apple Store,” McAhren said. “When you go to Apple you don’t have to go to a desk at all. They’ll ring you up wherever you are.

“Consumers are amazed because I think the bar is very low with expectations at a bike shop,” McAhren added. “My Shimano rep came in to buy tubes the other day and was blown away.”

It really comes in handy when there is a long line of customers, and sales staff can complete purchases with an iPod Touch, said McAhren. Sales staff love it for other reasons as well.

“If you’re on the other side of the store and someone wants to ask you about something—maybe we don’t have it in stock, but you want to check to see if it’s at our other store—you can do it without running all the way to the counter,” McAhren said.

As great as it is, McAhren would like to see some added features in the next version, like the ability to pull up a purchase order for receiving or to print a price tag remotely. “It’s good on the front end,” McAhren said. “I’d just like to see some more functionality for the back end.”

While there is an additional cost for the mobile hardware, LightSpeed’s Brown feels it’s less expensive than buying another computer for the store. For McAhren and his two stores, this is only the beginning of the mobile revolution.

“I think everything’s going to be mobile,” McAhren said. “I don’t even think we’re going to have desktops [in the future]. We’ve got some iPads in the store, too. We’re trying to untether ourselves as much as possible.” **BRAIN**