

Self-Checkout for the Independent Grocer

7 years ago Elden's Fresh Foods, a single store grocer in Alexandria Minnesota worked with their partner Retail Data Systems to do something many independent grocers are hesitant to do, put in self-checkout lanes.



Bring up self-checkout to many independent grocers and you immediately are bombarded with concerns about poor customer service, customers abandoning them because of the perception that they are eliminating community jobs, theft, and the idea that maybe their customers just won't get it. Nothing could be further from the truth shared Elliott Christianson (Owner) and Dave Gilchrist (POS Manager). Elden's has seen a solution that is helping them to level the playing field between them and the big box stores and that is helping them provide superior customer service.

Elden's runs 6 traditional lanes on their front end and 4 self-check terminals. The self-checkout terminals are overseen by a single employee who helps guide customers with smaller orders to the lane and assists new customers with transactions. Having the self-check lanes according to Elliott are the key to providing superior customer service.

Customers with smaller transactions 10 or less items are suggested to go to the self-check lanes to complete their orders. This gets them in and out of the store fast and shortens the lines in the traditional lanes.

When the self-checkout lanes were first put in, management made sure the employees in the store were ready and understood what the solution was and it wasn't. They let the employees know first...nobody is getting letting go and that the employees were trained on the benefits of the solution to the store. This was key in making sure that the employees were comfortable and happy so they could help customers feel good about the solution. Their employees became evangelists for the solutions. This was a huge help in the solutions success.

Currently about 17% of the customer throughput at Elden's goes through the self-checkout lanes. These are customers with smaller transactions, customers buying privacy items and those that simply just want to get in and out of the store without dealing with anyone. Elliot says the percentage continues to grow as the new NCR Self-Check-out solution installed by RDS, provides several advantages over their old system including EBT, cash and cash back. Cashback has been a major draw for customers to the self-checkout lanes. In the traditional lanes a customer can get up to \$40 cash back on a credit card transaction. In the self-checkout it's \$80.



The number of customers adopting the system continues to grow over time as more and more customers are moving towards the system. Elliott said that the labor savings with the solution have been there but the biggest gain is customer service. His customers love it Elliott said, "With self-checkout, Elden's has a reputation in the community as being the place in town you can get in, get your shopping done and get out of fast".

Elliotts advice to anyone looking at self-checkout?

“Have strong communication between your management, cash office, POS team and other employees. Make sure the decision is made by bringing everyone together and education on what this solution is and it isn’t. Additionally, try to stage the system in the back a few weeks before you go live so employees can play with the system and get used to it.”