



BIG W to begin Self-Checkout trial in two stores to improve customer service

BIG W, a division of Woolworths Limited, is trialing self-checkout from NCR Corporation systems in two of its Sydney stores - Warringah Mall (Brookvale) and Eastgardens (Pagewood), in a constant endeavour to improve customer service.

The NCR FastLane allows customers to scan, bag and pay for their own items using debit, credit or cash, without the assistance of a checkout operator.

BIG W is conducting a 12-month trial in two of its busiest stores in Sydney. Each store will have four NCR FastLane self-checkouts with one attendant station. The trial will be measured against a number of criteria including customers' perception, productivity and overall level of support. No decision will be made to roll out the units in other stores until a full evaluation is completed.

"We are conducting the trial because we really want to know what our customers think of the self-checkout unit - is it faster and more convenient? We will not proceed beyond the trial unless our customers and staff are in favour of the self-checkout units," said Marty Hamnett, General Manager, BIG W.

"We are trialing this new technology to offer our customers an alternative. We will definitely not be doing away with traditional checkouts in BIG W stores. As a result no staff will lose their jobs and any staff who are no longer required to work as checkout operators will work in other parts of the store, providing additional service to customers," he said.

The four self-checkout units are designed to be attended by one person, however there will be additional staff at the outset to encourage customers to try the new system and guide them through the process.

NCR FastLane technology is being used by over 30 retailers globally, including Marks & Spencer in the UK and US home improvement giant Home Depot. In its 2003 'Technology Review' survey, The Food Marketing Institute, based in Washington DC, found that 29 of its members have self-checkout in at least one store while 24 % are planning to install self-checkout.

"We are really excited that BIG W's customers will be the first to trial self-checkout in Australia.

Self-checkout has proven to be popular with shoppers overseas and we are confident that Australian consumers will be just as enthusiastic," said Mike Inge, Vice-President, South Asia Pacific Retail Solutions Division of NCR.

"Self-checkout aims to make shopping more convenient for the consumer, allowing shoppers to avoid long queues, and have more options at the checkout," Mr Inge said.

NCR FastLane is designed to be used by customers with the minimum of instruction. The customer scans their own items, a friendly voice reports the price of the item which is placed on a sensitive scale. This determines if the item that has just been scanned has been placed on the scale. The transaction will not proceed unless the item is placed on the scale. When all items have been scanned, the customer has the option of paying with cash, credit card or EFTPOS. For cash and EFTPOS this is fully automated. For credit cards the attendant will have to verify a signature before proceeding.

The NCR system has a number of security checks including the weighing of each product. As a customer scans each item it must be placed on the weight scale and until this is done the transaction will not complete. The system has the weight of every item in the store in its database and as soon as there is a discrepancy it will not proceed and an attendant will need to be called.

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