



ASDA praise for VMC cashless technology

ASDA, the UK's number two supermarket retailer, relies on an army of over 130,000 colleagues to maintain its position at the forefront of the UK's highly competitive supermarket industry - based on an ethos of quality, value, convenience and service.



It's an environment where innovation and product development flourish - you don't become part of the largest retailer in the world by chance.

When ASDA's UK management team decided to upgrade their cashless technology facilities - used by colleagues to make all on-site food and refreshment purchases - it was a mammoth task which required careful consideration and an in-depth market analysis.

ASDA, 'Britain's best value retailer', became part of the Wal-Mart family in June 1999 and has 265 stores and over 20 distribution depots across the UK - so any fundamental changes have an obvious big impact.

ASDA colleagues use cashless card technology to make purchases in their restaurants and at vending machines - with an innovative system from VMC now installed at the majority of sites, as part of an on-going roll-out programme.

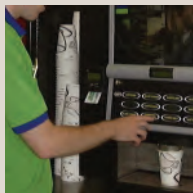
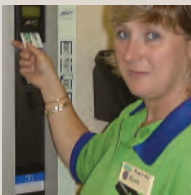


Head of ASDA's Commercial Department, Jim Murphy, played an instrumental role in introducing the VMC technology which first went live in September 2002, following almost a year of background research and an extensive tender process.

"It was my role to identify a supplier and the suitable equipment. The main reason for changing from the previous system - from a different manufacturer - was that it was up to seven years old and we felt it was time for a more modern approach.

"There was a thorough tender process and various reviews which took almost a year to complete. Due to the complexity of the product there was quite a lot to check out and essentially it was vital we made the correct decision. We had to get it right."

Colleagues load a cash value onto their cards to build up an 'electronic purse' to make purchases and since the VMC system was launched, vending machine downtime has been reduced significantly because the new technology by definition is more reliable and also there is a quick-fix solution if a card reader develops a problem.



Jim explained: "The thing that switched me onto VMC was that I could see a big reduction in maintenance costs. We can pull out a card reader and replace it in minutes if a problem occurs. Therefore downtime is kept to an absolute minimum. The previous process involved sending an engineer out which would normally take hours, not minutes.

"Now the reader can be replaced extremely quickly which is vital for stores and depots which trade 24 hours a day. It really comes into its own when the hot food restaurant service has closed through the night."

He declared: "We really liked the plug and play concept and could see the immediate advantages. The other main attraction about VMC was that whatever problems and issues we threw at them, each time their technical guys came back with innovative solutions."

Although the VMC system may appear complex, it is very easy to use, reliable and offers great potential for future developments. A touch pad catering till system, which is easy to clean and change prices - and different from customer restaurants - also earned Jim's praise.

"Even if a catering till goes down you can use a separate mini till which can be taken from back of house - so there is flexibility and a contingency plan in place," he explained.

"This is an extra benefit which VMC introduced. It is vital in keeping the catering operation going even if a till goes down. VMC is solution focused and this was very apparent throughout the tender process. They view problems as opportunities."

A trial of the equipment took place at Sutton in Ashfield - and was judged a resounding success.

Overall Jim is delighted by VMC as a company and its products and services. He concluded: "We have found VMC to be both understanding and flexible. It is very reassuring to know you are dealing with a company that really cares about its customers. I am very happy with VMC but the real proof is the store feedback which has been equally impressive."

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