

# Self-Checkout Lives Up To Its Name

**After rolling out a true end-to-end self-checkout system, up to 22% of K-VA-T Food Stores' customers regularly use the system, which accounts for up to 15% of overall store sales.**

by Jay McCall

**T**he retail industry has witnessed an emergence of self-help technology — ranging from store kiosks, that enable customers to look up product information, to self-checkout lanes, which enable customers to bypass slow cashiers and long lines by handling their own merchandise. But, not all self-help technology is as helpful as its name implies. Take some self-checkout systems, for instance. After customers scan their products and

bag them, they take them over to a service desk — usually manned by one employee — and wait in line as traditional checkout customers file out ahead of them. This scenario could be more accurately described as customer-assisted checkout — a concept that is self-defeating at best.

K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc. (Abingdon, VA) comprises 86 supermarkets throughout the tri-state region of southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and northeast Tennessee. After searching for ways to get an edge on its competitors, it

## Installation Profile

**Technology User:** K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc. (Abingdon, VA) comprises 86 supermarkets throughout the tri-state region of southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and northeast Tennessee.

**Problem:** While searching for ways to edge out its competition, K-VA-T Food Stores discovered that self-checkout lanes would be a viable way to provide better customer service. The only problem was that in many of the grocer's stores there was minimal space to add more checkout lanes.

**Solution:** K-VA-T Food Stores found NCR's (Atlanta) FastLane self-checkout systems to be a good fit, both in terms of their physical size as well as their ability to enable customers to scan, weigh, bag, and pay for groceries without employee assistance.

looked into self-checkout. "We had two primary criteria for our self-checkout system," recalls Don Mascola, director of in-store services at K-VA-T Food Stores. "First, the system had to take up about half the space of a conventional checkout lane. And second, it had to offer end-to-end self checkout — not employee-assisted checkout only."

K-VA-T Food Stores discovered NCR's FastLane self-checkout met its criteria. The system came in a variety of sizes and enabled customers to pay for their purchases with cash, debit, credit, or EBT (electronic benefit transfer). Prior to deploying the self-checkout systems in any of its grocery stores, NCR and K-VA-T Food Stores' POS vendors (Innovax and Retalix) worked together to create APIs (application program interfaces) among the systems. "After the interfaces were created we set up a pilot in our test lab, located at our main facility," says Mascola. "During the three-month pilot we were able to tweak the program and work out any bugs that we could find, such as making sure debit transactions accepted PINs and all touch screen functions worked properly."

## Training Leads To Greater Autonomy

Even though K-VA-T Food Stores' goal was to have customers help themselves, it didn't believe self-training was the best way to introduce the new checkout lanes to customers. The grocer spends six weeks training store employees and customers how to use the system. "A lot of people have a fear of new technology," says Mascola.

"They worry that they will make a mistake and get stuck waiting for a store manager to help them. But, if there is a trainer nearby, they are more inclined to try it out and become familiar with the process." After the six-week period is up, the designated K-VA-T Food Stores trainer no longer stands by the self-checkout system. "The FastLane features a paging mechanism, which is triggered when the 'Help' button is pushed, or when a customer scans a tobacco or alcohol product, or if a customer puts an item in the bag without scanning it," says Mascola. "We designate two employees — one of whom is usually a store manager — to respond to the self-checkout 'Help' or 'Authorization Required' response."



**After witnessing the success of its self-checkout lanes in 25 of its stores, K-VA-T Food Stores plans to roll out self-checkout systems at 61 more stores in the next few years.**

## Self-Checkout Saves Space, Time

K-VA-T Food Stores has currently rolled out the NCR FastLanes at 25 of its 86 stores. Depending on the size of the store, there may be anywhere from two to four self-checkout lanes. On average, the self-checkout lanes occupy half the floor space their counterparts require.

**"A lot of people have a fear ... that they will make a mistake and get stuck waiting for a store manager to help them. ..."**

*Don Mascola, K-VA-T Food Stores*

Stores estimates that up to 22% of its customers prefer to use the self-checkout lanes and that the self-checkout lanes account for up to 15% of the grocer's sales. "The general profile of the person who prefers to use the self-check-

The grocer has observed that during peak business periods, the self-checkout lanes help keep the overall checkout lines to a minimum. K-VA-T Food