

# How to choose the best software for your gun shop

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By Mark Fletcher, CEO, Tower Systems  
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A software company relationship can make or break for a gun shop.

The right software will help your business genuinely save time, make better business decisions and increase sales.

The wrong software will cost you time, hide the right business decisions and become a barrier to growth.

A good software company will provide good software and back this with assistance and guidance which leads you to use it well and thereby unlock all of the benefits, personal and commercial, which could be available to you.

I'll be upfront and say that **Tower Systems is a good software company** and the **Tower Systems software is good software for gun shop owners**. Of course I would say that – I own the business. I have much at stake – relationships with 2,500 small business owners including gun shop owners.

Years ago I decided we would be the best. This decision has framed every business decision we have made since. Everything we do within Tower Systems pursues our position as the best software company for gun shop owners. I do mean everything – from the people we hire to software changes we implement to training we deliver.

We obsess about being the best because we know that doing this will deliver the best outcomes for our customers and that this, in turn, will deliver what we want out of our business.

## Choosing the right software

First up I want to change what you call the software I want to talk about. Gun shop owners often talk about POS software. That is, Point of Sale software. Point of Sale functions are only part of the story. This is why I refer to what gun shop owners need as **Retail**

Choosing the right software for your Gun shop is easy if you follow these simple steps:

- be sure of what your business needs;
- understand what your suppliers will expect;
- understand the value of this to your business;
- be in control of the process;
- thoroughly assess the people offering you the software, don't be conned.

It is easy for software sales people to confuse you and guide you to the wrong choice for your business. This can be avoided if you stick to the simple steps outlined in this document. **Remember, caveat emptor!**

Some sales people need to be reminded that this is your choice and that you will choose the system which is best for your business, based on your needs.

Retail Gun shops have needs which are unique. While they also share needs with other retailers, it is these unique needs that are most important to the business.

### **Gun shops need software that serves their specific needs.**

Take out a sheet of paper rule a line down the middle. On the left hand side, note down the key requirements of a computer system which you consider will be unique to your business.

What is it you do which you feel no other Retail Gun shop would require? Do you sell categories of products gun shops do not usually handle? Do you handle repairs?

In creating this part of the list on the left hand side of the paper, consider these questions:

- What information do you need to make your business decisions? Do you prefer to focus on profitability? ROI? Return of floor space? Benchmarking?
- Do you run separate accounts and LayBys?
- Do you want to link to other suppliers from your system?
- Do you have a loyalty program and if so are there processes unique to you?
- Do you want to link your registers and the data collected to a security system?
- Do you want to receive text messages when possible employee fraud occurs?
- Do you want to automate the staff roster or do you prefer to handle this manually?
- How do you market to existing customers and would you want your software to help?

Next to each of your requirements, note the amount of time you spend with current processes. This could be the amount of time you save by purchasing the right system.

There are bound to be other business specific questions and requirements you could consider. The list above is provided to start you off.

On the right hand side of the paper, note down what is important to you in the software company from which you purchase your Gun shop software:

- **They are committed to *your* business outcomes.** Anyone can develop point of sale software. It takes deep commitment develop and deploy good software.
- **They provide excellent service.** Check with Gun shop owners using their software, not just reference sites provided by the companies but others.
- **They host regular user meetings and training sessions.** Ask for a list of all they have run in the last year and check this with other Gun shop owners.
- **They offer online training.** In case you can't easily leave the shop.
- **You retain control of your system.** There is a risk in allowing a software company to update software without your approval and involvement.
- **They own the software.** There is nothing worse than buying through an agent who does not have easy direct access to the software developers.
- **They are transparent and consistent about pricing.** Some software companies charge less for people who say good things about them.
- **Support fees are fair and do not increase beyond CPI.** Ask for a copy of support fees from the last four years. Check this with other Gun shop owners.
- **They are prepared to help you compare their system with another of your choice function by function.** Few software companies will allow transparent comparison.
- **The software is yours to keep.** Once you purchase the software you do not have to pay further licencing fees to use the software. Some systems are licenced annually – meaning you **MUST** pay a fee to keep the software active.

- **Training.** The system is provided with on site training by the company itself. Too many software companies nowadays contract training out.
- **Enhancement suggestions.** Make sure that the software company has a mechanism for you making your enhancement suggestions known to them.

Get copies of all the key documents you use: receipts, orders, reports and any spreadsheets you create to manage the business – if the system is to be of value it must replace these.

Now, compare the websites of the software companies. Assess ease of navigation, professionalism and speed. These are all indicators of the software the companies sell.

When you *are* ready, arrange the demonstrations, book these for your Gun shop so that the sales people can see your business first hand.

If, after the first demonstration, you cannot decide between, say, two systems. Invite them back to demonstrate again at the same time so that you really can compare apples with apples. Many software companies will reject this, preferring to deal one on one with you.

When you feel ready to make a decision, ask for reference sites - but understand that you will only be given good reference sites so ask around for other references.

I urge you to visit the offices of the software company – there is nothing like seeing how they operate internally to assess whether you want to do business with them. Is it a happy and professional workplace? Do the employees seem stressed?

While this focus on the actual software company may seem like a lot of work, the reality is that this is a long term business relationship. The more effort you put into the courting phase the more likely the relationship will survive and your Gun shop will thrive.

Good luck. If you're well prepared you won't need luck.

#### **About Tower Systems**

Tower Systems began in 1981 in Melbourne Australia. Since its formation, the business has focused solely on the needs of small business retailers. Today, the company serves in excess of 2,500 small business retailers in Australia, New Zealand, FIJI and several Asian countries. Tower Systems has offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Auckland. Tower Systems is a proud supporter of the **Make A Wish Foundation**.

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