

Choosing the right software for your jewellery shop.

By Mark Fletcher, CEO, Tower Systems

Selecting the right software for any small business is an important and business defining task. In this article, Mark Fletcher provides advice which guides jewellery retailers to making the right decision on POS software for their business.

There are many software systems for jewellers and many claims made about these software packages. Unfortunately, not all claims are true.

Not all software packages for jewellers are the same. Some are more complex than others, some too simple, some cheap, some expensive, some technical and not business focused, some not really jeweller solutions and some not Australian.

It can be a daunting and confusing process selecting the right software for your jeweller business. If you follow no other advice in this article, take your time.

This document aims to help you find the right jeweller management software for your business by following simple processes which put your needs ahead of all else.

Choosing the right software for your jewellery shop will be easy if you follow these simple and well proven steps:

- be sure of what *your* business needs;
- understand the value of this to *your* business;
- remain focused on the business outcomes important to *you*.

Yes, you are at the heart of this journey. Good software which does not serve your needs is no solution at all. This is why only you can manage the process and why you need to remain focused on your needs.

There is no point in buying software which does not meet your needs and cannot be easily modified to serve you.

It is easy for professional software sales people to confuse you along the way. This can be avoided if you stick to the three simple steps. Some sales people need to be reminded that this is your choice and that you will choose the system which is right for your business.

While I could write thousands of words on how to go about determining your needs and preparing an appropriate specification document, the reality for many independent jewellery retailers is that this is not appropriate. Instead, I recommend a single sheet of paper approach. It's easy and achievable by business people of all skill sets.

So, take out a sheet of paper rule a line down the middle. On the left hand side, note down the requirements of a computer system which you consider will be unique to your business. What is it you do which you feel not many other jewellery retailers would require? Do you put extra emphasis on ease of use? Will your business need comprehensive support? How important is securing your database and business information? Do you operate off a non standard markup policy? Do you handle repairs internally, externally, or both?

Most good Point of Sale systems have common functionality in the traditional areas of selling, printing receipts, handling customer accounts, managing discounting and reporting on sales. It is in the 'fringe' and use of use where you will find differences and these often are differences in businesses as well.

In creating this list of functions and facilities which are unique to your business consider these questions:

1. How computer literate is your team? Will they cope with a complex system? If the answer is no, focus on ease of use of the software.
2. How do you handle Lay Bys? Is your approach common?
3. Do you have a loyalty program and if so is it unique to your business?
4. Does your business repair or manufacture jewellery internally, externally or both? If so would you want your software to help with this?
5. Do you have a need to compare the performance of multiple suppliers in a specific department?
6. Do you need to track fast moving stock items?

7. Do you want protection for old hardware? Or, are you happy for the software only to support new hardware as it is released?
8. Do you want to control the amount you spend on training?
9. Do you want access to online training for your staff long after the system is installed?
10. Do you want to have a say in the future development of the software?
11. Do you wish to compare staff sales results and process commissions accordingly?
12. How do you market to existing customers and would use your software to help?

Next to each of your requirements be sure to note the amount of time you spend with current systems and processes. This could be the amount of time you save by purchasing another system.

There are many other business specific questions and requirements you could consider. The list above is provided to stimulate your thoughts about the specific needs you have in your jewellery shop.

It may be that your needs are not covered in any existing system. This is when you need to decide on whether the cost of NOT having access to these needs being covered is worth the considerable saving of going with an off the shelf system.

On the right hand side of the paper, note down what is important to you in the software company from which you purchase your software. These points ought to be the must haves without which you will knock out a business. For what it's worth and based on many years serving small businesses similar to yours, here are my suggestions for this list:

- **They own the software.** That is, you are purchasing from the company which develops the software. There is nothing worse than buying through an agent who does not have easy direct access to the software developers.
- **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.
- **The software is regularly updated.**

- **Training.** The system is provided with on site training by the company itself. Too many software companies nowadays contract on site training out or do not provide on site training. This provides an opportunity for them to point the finger if there are later support issues.
- **Easy support access.** They support your business by investing seriously in their support. 24/7 telephone software support is available.
- **User meetings.** Make sure there are opportunities for you to meet with other users and representatives from the company. These are excellent learning opportunities which help you unlock the real value of your software.
- **Enhancement suggestions.** Make sure that the software company has a mechanism for you making your enhancement suggestions known to them. This demonstrates that your opinions really do matter.

Once you have this sheet of paper you are almost ready to start looking at software systems.

Take some time to get together copies of all the key documents you use. You will need to compare these with what any POS system you consider offers. This includes receipts, orders, reports and especially any spreadsheets you work on to manage the business.

You are almost ready to look at possible systems. First up, compare the websites of the companies you are considering. Be sure to assess the ease of navigation of the websites, the professionalism and speed. These are all indicators of the software the companies sell.

When you are ready, arrange the demonstrations. Book these for your shop so that the sales people can see your business first hand. If they offer you a demonstration copy of the software say no as this is a lazy way to sell, leaving you to do all the work.

Set a time limit for the demonstration and always remain in control. This purchase is about you and NOT about them. Some will use all manner of awful tactics to try and get you to buy their systems. Remaining in control will help you resist this and lead you to buying the best POS software for your shop.

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 them for reference sites that operate similarly to your business. Call them. But understand that you will only be given good reference sites so ask these folk if they know anyone else using the software.

If you have time, 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? Do the people you would have most to do with seem to want your business?

The ultimate choice you will make is about the people more than the software. This is why I recommend taking your time and assessing the various people you will rely on to make the software work for your business.

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 jewellery 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 2,000 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 Lighthouse Foundation, an organisation working with troubled young people in need of a caring home environment.

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