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SET UP FOR
SUCCESS

Today's modern forecourt and c-store platforms should be open-platform, software-based systems that deliver operational efficiency, security and ongoing flexibility.

BY JERRY SOVERINSKY

The convenience store industry is at an inflection point—again. There's a widening gulf between the have and have-nots. Many of the lesser performing stores are struggling to remain competitive, with decreasing fuel demand, shrinking tobacco sales and escalating labor costs all cutting into margins. Add to that increased competition from dollar stores, grocers and Amazon, and there's a perfect storm of factors pressing down on the industry's collective bottom line.

And that was before COVID-19.

As consumers venture out more into public, trading work-from-home arrangements for hybrid or even old normal routines, there's an urgency among fuel retailers to claw back sales, stimulating trip frequency and basket size to right a damaged ship.

Easier said than done.

Discretionary spending is hard to come by, yet distinguishing yourself from your competitors is an operational mandate. Where to begin?

For Invenco, a global provider of secure self-service payment terminals and c-store solutions, the answer is modernization: bringing efficient, connected systems from the forecourt to the c-store. "Today's consumer is spoiled for choice, making first impressions critical," said Chief Innovation Officer Dan Harrell. "For many fuel customers, everything starts and ends at the forecourt. Providing them with a premier experience helps build loyalty and position your business for success."

But the modernized forecourt is more than the customer-facing experience. It's a tightly integrated platform of solutions that deliver efficiencies, security and greater flexibility into a retailer's systems and infrastructure, as well as performance enhancements and actionable data that help create a more successful and durable business.

So, what exactly goes into building a modern forecourt and what can it mean for your business? And more important, how best can retailers build one today when ROI is more important than ever.

Let's take a look.

THE MODERN FORECOURT

When Invenco speaks of the modern forecourt, this isn't an aesthetic renovation but an infrastructure overhaul that impacts the retailer's back-end operations and every touchpoint of the customer experience—personalized communications (targeted promotions, identity protection), payment method and security (EMV, contactless and next generation payments, ACH), vehicle energy delivery (electric charging, CNG, hydrogen), and external factors (competing channels, autonomous vehicles).

"These are not disparate components and must coordinate in such a way that today's retailer can deploy them easily, without fear of incompatibility," said Harrell. "Closed, spiderweb systems that are difficult to update and difficult to integrate create problems for both the customer and retailer. An open API platform is key to success."

Most forecourts today, he said, include too many proprietary interface configurations, with integration failures common. "As a result, new implementations become costly, with timeframes that are excessive—many greater than one year."

To address these challenges, Invenco created iNFX and Invenco Cloud services, an

iNVENCO®

architecture that facilitates innovation quickly and easily and that fosters seamless integration among forecourt equipment. It's an open architecture approach to modernization, one that is committed to standards and that has the retailer—not vendor—firmly in control.

"iNFX furthers a mission of secure digital agility," Harrell said. The system works by separating core business functionalities previously rooted in hardware or complex systems and solving for those functions with lightweight and cloud-based microservices software. The software is connected through open APIs with additional core functions and third-party integrations. The iNFX system additionally comes pre-integrated with Invenco's pay-at-pump terminals and Cloud Services management platform, all of which sit on open systems.

BENEFITS THAT MAKE (DOLLARS AND) SENSE

With iNFX and its cloud-based based services platform, forecourt modernization is future-proof, making it far simpler to deploy and manage system functions and features. The standards-based architecture drives efficiency with improved operations, less money spent on service deployments, proactive system upkeep and better opportunities for customer engagements. The overall result is a better user interface for the employee and customer.

RECOMMENDED STEPS

Of course, disassembling an existing system—especially at once—is an overwhelming prospect. With multiple pieces of hardware, software and integrations already setup between systems, disrupting that system may seem impossible.

But it's not. Invenco advises a systematic approach that addresses modernization one step at a time.

The approach we encourage advises Harrell, "is for sites to start small and expand from there. Conceptualizing an entire system change at once is overwhelming. Instead, retailers should individually 'section' each piece of current functionality (even if it is not set up this way in the current system) and address those pieces in as many different steps as they feel comfortable doing so."

Rather than approach things from a "low hanging fruit" perspective, Invenco advises addressing major problems first, a prioritization that delivers the greatest overall benefits to the retailer in the shortest amount of time.

Harrell advises this will ensure that your site is taking a major step in the right direction and allocating resources to your biggest problem areas."

Once a plan is developed and the process begins, the retailer can expect to realize returns quickly, a reflection of the cloud-based system and open API that promotes third-party integrations. "Retailers who have been relying on closed, slow systems may not realize they may be missing out on revenue-generating opportunities because of those systems and should challenge their providers to ensure they have systems that will enable them to reach full potential. In order to ensure they are getting the most of their systems, they should," says Harrell. By closing systems to third-party integrations, providers may limit their own competition—but the retailer ends up missing out.

All of that sounds good on (digital) paper, but a real-world demonstration provides more insights into the modernization process.

GETGO ELEVATES THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

For Pittsburgh-based GetGo, Invenco's iNFX solutions have provided back-end efficiencies while providing its customers with a dynamic media experience at the pump.

TERMINOLOGY

Open System: Open systems have publicly available communication paths, so any third party that wants to connect can do so. Closed systems require permission from the system provider to integrate. Invenco's open system approach means that third-party solutions like food ordering, personalization, loyalty and media can be quickly integrated with core systems.

Platform Architecture: iNFX's unique structure of separate but connected microservices detangles the web of overlapping functionalities and communication paths that complicate proprietary systems. By breaking down each function into separate pieces of software, retailers can address a specific piece of functionality without touching additional parts of the system. This means easier updates, integrations and management of the entire platform and the ability to focus on the pieces of each system most important to the business at a point in time.

Cloud-based Management: Invenco's Cloud Services (ICS) Platform provides a holistic view of assets through real-time data collected over the cloud. ICS proactively alerts retailers of terminal issues with notifications so they can be addressed quickly through remote diagnostics. The platform also improves operational costs by enabling retailers to deploy remote software and compliance updates and media and prompt "playlists" to pay-at-pump terminals across pumps, sites or geographies.

Invenco partnered with GetGo earlier this year to add its G6 and G7 Pay-at-Pump terminals, iNFX retail microservices, and its cloud services management platform at its 266 locations. The goal was addressing the retailer's need for outdoor EMV while using technology to improve systems to better engage consumers.

Leveraging Invenco's Cloud Services, the new terminals deliver a robust media experience to GetGo fuel customers, along with video promotions that can be customized by location, time of day and rotated to remain current and fresh. It's a massive upgrade from GetGo's previous static signage experience.

"Creating an engaging, personalized experience for our customers is a top priority at GetGo and our new Invenco terminals, management platform and upgraded service software are the latest store innovation to reflect our commitment," said Rug Phatak, GetGo spokesperson. "Promotions shared at the pump can be tailored by store location and will allow us to personalize the experience for customers in the future. The terminals and new technology support GetGo's focus on innovation and continuous enhancement of the customer experience."

Invenco pay-at-pump terminals incorporate enhanced security with outdoor EMV-enabled chip readers, advanced data protection and anti-skimming technology. As well as NFC contactless readers for touchless payments like Apple Pay, Google Pay and mobile wallet credit cards.

To support GetGo's robust foodservice program, the technology also supports mobile ordering for fresh food offerings, interactive functionality for strong customer engagement to help build sales. In a short time, the retailer has seen strong and sustained incremental sales of foodservice items, a significant percentage of that coming from our new terminal ordering capabilities.

MOVING FORWARD

The systems required to process a fuel sale are extensive and complex. And modifying elements within that system can be expensive, not to mention fraught with uncertainties.

Invenco's suite of secure solutions brings secure, open digital agility to the process, an innovative approach to forecourt modernization that improves performance and efficiency. The result is faster enhancement deployments, improved site operations, quicker transactions, and a better customer experience.

At a time when the battle for market share is more competitive than ever, can you afford anything less? **C**

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