SUMMARY

Bealls Department Stores
Bealls Outlet Stores
Bradenton, FL

Partner
DBK Concepts, LLC
Miami, FL

Industry
Retail

Challenge
- Boost inventory visibility
- Optimize price markdowns
- Maximize workplace productivity
- Enhance the omnichannel shopper experience

Solution
- eTC51 mobile computers
- QLn220 mobile printer
- IQ Color barcode labels

Results
- Accelerated pace of markdowns by up to 35%
- Expedited order picking process
- Increased valuable associate time spent with shoppers
- Heightened the shopper experience

Investing in technology to conquer the demands of the 'now economy'

Retailer taps mobile computing to optimize markdowns, omnichannel fulfillment, and enhance the shopper experience

Situation/Challenge

Bealls buy online, pick up in store business is growing rapidly as its shoppers increasingly crave the convenience of purchasing from multiple retail channels. The rising popularity of click-and-collect made the need for operational efficiency exponentially more critical for the chain. However, outdated legacy devices with poor visual display screens and unreliable functionality hobbled the retailer's ability to fulfill online orders and conduct markdowns. The devices hurt both worker productivity and the overall shopper experience. Bealls set out to boost inventory visibility, maximize workplace productivity and optimize price markdowns to better serve consumers' omnichannel shopping needs, while granting store associates more time to serve shoppers.

Solution:

The retailer turned to Zebra Technologies and Zebra Premiere Business Partner DBK to implement the TC51 mobile computing platform, the QLn220 mobile printer with patented IQ Color direct thermal labels as a markdown and click-and-collect technology solution. The solution streamlined online order fulfillment and brough new ease and accuracy to price markdowns.

Result:

Zebra's handheld TC51 mobile computer, the QLn220 mobile printer and IQ Color labels enabled Bealls' store associates to zip through markdowns 25% to 35% faster, boosted the productivity of order picking so that items could be shipped to shoppers more quickly, and freed up associates to spend more time with customers on the sales floor.
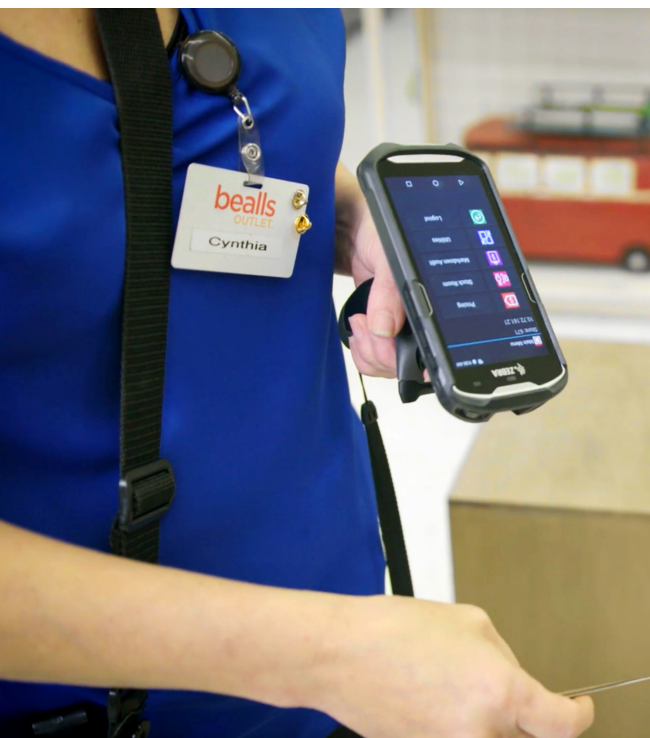
Serving The Rewired, Digital-Era Consumer

It's been called many things: the "Uber," "on-demand," and "now economy," to name a few. Whatever the moment's moniker, the Internet and mobile technology are fueling a radical transformation of how consumers shop and what they expect of the buying experience in a retail landscape disrupted by global e-commerce sales. Today's mobile-directed, Uber-hailing, Netflix-streaming consumers, who have the world's round-the-clock mall at their smartphone-tethered fingertips, are being rewired for instant gratification. And that rewiring is having a profound impact on retailers.

A Tech Upgrade For A Bricks-And-Clicks Retail Landscape

Bealls customers located throughout America's Sun Belt region are changing as well, finds the Bradenton, Florida-based, family-owned retailer, which operates stores under the Bealls Outlets, Burkes Outlets and Bunulu nameplates. Serving its modern shoppers called for a technology upgrade to meet rising expectations for a quick, friction-free buying journey that seamlessly traversed their smartphones, desktop computers, and Bealls' 530 brick-and-mortar stores in 16 states.

For the 103-year retailer with over 10,000 employees, "Technology plays an extremely important role in our stores, both for our associates and for our customers," said John Greene, director of solution delivery for stores system at Bealls. "As time goes by, and as customer expectations change over the years, we have to adapt, and we have to meet their expectations for a great experience when they visit our stores, whether online or in the physical stores."

But over time, the struggle to meet consumers' digitally informed demands with Bealls outdated mobile devices became all too clear. "Our previous generation of devices had been discontinued by the manufacturer; the operating system was no longer supported, and the failure rate of the devices was growing," explained Greene. "All of that was combining to start creating a very difficult time for our store operations teams to efficiently and quickly execute their tasks, which in turn, has an impact on our customers."

That technology-to-needs mismatch crystallized around two central challenges: Despite rising buy online, pick up in store sales, the retailer lacked an effective click-and-collect technology solution to fulfill those orders.

What's more, the retailer's existing handheld system failed to conduct price markdowns with the precision, speed and agility needed to compete in a retail marketplace upended by price transparency. Savvy shoppers can check the cost of an item in seconds on their smartphone, not to mention the dynamic pricing acumen of e-commerce sites that can change prices over two million times a day.[1]

All told, the outmoded technology was stymieing worker productivity and compromising the shopper experience. Bealls turned to Zebra Technologies in the hopes of boosting inventory visibility, optimizing workplace flow efficiency and ratcheting up the productivity of its sales associates so that they could more effectively serve shoppers in store. "From a business perspective, our first objective was to stabilize and improve the store performance and workers' ability to execute their daily tasks," noted Greene, "we knew we had to make a change."

[1] Intelligence Node, *Can Dynamic Pricing Save Retailers From the Discounting Drug?*

Reinveinting 'Click And Collect'

Just as shoppers increasingly expect the convenience perk of buy online, pick up in store, Bealls found that its click-and-collect business was growing. It behooves all retailers to get click-and-collect right, and Bealls is no exception. That's because most consumers shop via multiple channels, and multichannel shoppers spend 4% more in brick-and-mortar stores than single-channel shoppers.[2]

Bealls was hobbled by outdated devices for handling those orders. The battery life of its hand-held devices "would last only a few hours and die," said Kent Brouwer, director of store operations. And in many instances, store associates "would run out of batteries because the battery life wasn't there." What's more, the mobile devices produced product images that were small and difficult to decipher.

Bealls switched to Zebra's TC51 mobile computer and started to see the benefits of its features right away. The device includes a large touch screen and a high-resolution display. Its sharper screen clarity surpassed the retailer's prior tool, enabling workers to find the location of an item faster, be it on a store shelf or in the stock room.

At the same time, unlike the previous tool's battery life that lasted just hours, the TC51 battery stays charged all day. The device streamlined click-and-collect fulfillment at large for the retailer, from boosting the productivity and accuracy of order picking to shortening the time it takes for shoppers to retrieve their online order — whether they pick it up in store, or have it delivered to their home.

A stop-and-start workflow waylaid by changing dead batteries and deciphering hard-to-read screens morphed into one in which store associates fulfilled online orders with newfound effectiveness, Bealls merchants said. "From an online shopping experience, the TC51s have helped our associates find items faster and more efficiently, which has allowed items to be shipped in a more timely manner," commented Brouwer. "And from the standpoint of the guest, they're able to get their product faster than they have in the past."

Markdown Makeover

Streamlining click-and-collect was just one challenge facing the retailer. Bealls needed to expedite the necessary-but-time-intensive retail task that can monopolize store associates' workday: marking down merchandise.

When it came to re-pricing goods, the retailer's existing tool routinely crashed, tacking on hours of labor spent re-ticketing marked-down items. Additionally, the device's scan-to-print lag time routinely led to pricing mistakes. As a result, "there were a lot of errors in terms of SKUs being missed," described Bealls' Amanda Day, business analyst for store systems. After switching over to the TC51, the markdown process of scanning an item and printing a new price label with Zebra's QLn220 high duty-cycle mobile printers was nearly simultaneous.

Associates simply scan an item's barcode using the TC51. The information is then automatically relayed to the QLn220 where, using Zebra's patented IQ Color direct thermal ink technology, the printer produces a label with the original price crossed out, the reduced price and the corresponding color dot to indicate the discount percentage. IQ Color is a powerful alternative to using preprinted color thermal media, laser or ink jet printing, separate color labels, or color markers.

[2] Harvard Business Review, *A Study of 46,000 Shoppers Shows That Omnichannel Retailing Works*

The QLn220 is ideally suited for the retail environment with its drop-resistant durability coupled with user-friendly, productivity boosting features.

Today, Bealls' store associates are able to zip through markdowns 25% to 35% faster than with the old equipment, recounted Chris Collins, vice president of operations for Bealls Outlet and Burkes Outlet. "And if you want to be competitive with the off-price industry, speed becomes huge."

From the shoppers' point of view, "They're seeing more accurate SKUS, they're seeing more accurate markdowns," added Day.

The mobile device also equips workers to serve shoppers and address their in-the-moment needs — from signing up for a loyalty card to tracking down inventory or conducting a price check — on the spot. "Say a customer is looking to see if a blue shirt comes in a different color, we have the ability to see the size and color available" via the mobile device, remarked Sandy Wetmore, ad manager for Bealls. "So, the customers are much happier, as are we."

And instead of a shopper standing in the checkout line waiting to sign up with a cashier for a loyalty program, "these new, advanced mobility applications on the devices will allow them to enroll in a loyalty program or apply for a credit card anywhere in the store that an associate engages with them," said Greene.

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>
> **Chris Collins Vice President of Operations for Bealls Outlet and Burkes Outlet**

Stoking The Human Touch With Tech

The TC51 mobile computer has freed up time for store associates to better cater to consumers, engaging with them longer and more fully, Bealls merchants said, which is no small benefit.

That one-on-one connection is more critical than one might think in the age of digitally enabled everything. In what PwC dubs an "experience disconnect," whereby "companies tout the latest technology or snappy design," but fail to nurture "one big connector: human touch." "That is, creating real connections by making technology feel more human and giving employees what they need to create better customer experiences."[3]

It turns out shoppers are craving a bigger helping of the human touch. Eighty-two percent of U.S. consumers, revealed they want more of it in the future.[4] Tapping technology to enhance, not supplant, the human touch delivers a return on investment.

Bealls' director of solution delivery John Greene seems to agree. "We have a good roadmap and a vision for both that balance of associate-facing applications that will help make them more efficient, but also they can take that time that they had been spending wrestling with obsolete technology and struggling to get those daily tasks accomplished and can spend that time now with customers helping to grow those relationships."

[3,4] PwC, *Experience is everything: Here's how to get it right*

To learn more about how zebra can help you improve operational effiency and enhance the shopper experience, visit **zebra.com/retail**