

Wal-mart self-checkout

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Wal-Mart first opened its doors in 1962 in Rogers, Arkansas by founded Sam Walton and his wife Helen. Due to the fact that he was paying for the stores out of his own pocket, by 1972 Walton had only opened a total of fifteen Wal-Marts. In 1972, stock was offered on the New York Stock Exchange, which allowed Walton to increase the amount of stores to 276 in eleven states. In 1988, a Supercenter opened, which consisted of a grocery section and various departments of other necessities. By the 21st century, more than 7,800 stores had opened up, becoming one of the quickest growing chains of retail stores.

Before technology became as advanced as it is now, Wal-Mart used to consist of only the employees tending to the customers. Besides stocking shelves and keeping the stores clean and up to health codes, the employees would also be the ones working the cash registers and assisting customers with their purchases. Now, however, many stores have opened their arms to the new technology that allows customers to check themselves out by means of self-checkout counters and conveyor belts. It can be debated, though, whether or not this change in technology is for the better.

Some of the positive aspects of self-checkouts are the smaller lines at the traditional checkout counters, the wider availability of open registers and therefore less wait time, all of which are convenient for the customers. Customers find self-checkouts to be convenient because they do not have to put up with others, customer and employee alike, and get out of the store in their own time. Also, since less cashiers are required for checkout, more can be tending to keeping the shelves stocked and the aisles orderly. There are also negative aspects to the self-checkout.

When an inexperienced customer attempts to use the checkout, they tend to cause similar delays that would take place at a monitored checkout stand. This defeats one of the purposes of the self-checkout unit. The scales on the checkout stands also have the habit of falsely reporting what has or has not been scanned, or what has or has not been bagged. When these situations occur, a monitor has to come over and set things straight; it is not something that a customer can do on their own unless they are proficient at using the machine.

The biggest downfall of self-checkouts is how vulnerable they are to shoplifters. The machine is unable to pick up on the actual item that is being purchased; it depends solely on the barcode that it scans. In 2007, a man switched the price tags between a DVD and a plasma television and attempted to purchase the television at the same price as the DVD (Associated Press, 2007). The machine does not know what the person is actually purchasing, just that something is being scanned. With the self-checkouts, cashiers have been replaced by automated voices, touch screens, and weight sensors.

A person scans their items, is prompted to select the specific item when scanning produce, bags their items which are weighed by the scale to make sure that they have been placed in the bag, then given their total. They insert their money into the machine, are given their change and receipt, and are then sent on their way. The self-checkout machines rely heavily on sensors to pick up the products and to take and dispense the money (Webster, 2006). The biggest change in technology is how sensitive it has become.

A job that used to be done, or needed to be done, rather, by a human is now being taken over by a complex machine with only a few flaws. The technology has now allowed the customers to be in charge of their complete shopping experiences. What does work with this kind of technology is that it makes shopping and checking out faster and more convenient. What does not work is that shoplifting schemes have been taken to a whole new level. With the convenience comes a price if someone is able to make off with something bigger than what they paid for.

In this case, sometimes convenience and the easy way out are not the best options.

References

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