

Kentucky's Morgantown IGA Is First to Use Convertible Checkout Technology

Morgantown IGA in Kentucky is the first supermarket to use first-of-its-kind technology that allows a checklane to operate in both manned and self-check modes. The Morgantown, Ky., store, owned by Houchens Industries, is testing the Utopia Solution™, which was developed by Pan-Oston Co., a Houchens subsidiary. The store has the units in two of its checklanes in a trial to ensure it works flawlessly before being placed on the market.

The customizable system does not require retailers to redesign their front ends, and it can be easily and quickly converted from customer self-checkout to cashier checkout based on store traffic. "Our expectation is that during high-volume periods, it will be switched over for checkout by a cashier," says Alan Larsen, Houchens' merchandising and marketing director. "For low-volume traffic when an extra cashier isn't needed, it could serve as a self-checkout."

An advantage to the system, Larsen notes, is that it is not sold in pods, meaning a retailer will be able to economically purchase one unit. "It's a very good system, especially for the small, independent looking to be more efficient," he says.

Another benefit is the Utopia Solution's ease of use for shoppers, says Tracy Worley, Houchen's district manager who worked with the Morgantown store on its installation.

"We had over 50 percent usage during the first two weeks of operation," Worley reports. "Customers have been very pleased because it's very user-friendly and self-explanatory."

Morgantown IGA store manager Don Davis says customers who have been reluctant to self-scan their groceries mentioned having difficulty with self-scan units at larger stores such as Wal-Mart.



The Utopia Solution™ checkout system allows retailers to convert from a self-checkout mode (above) to a manned cashier checkout (right) during high-volume periods without having to redesign their front ends.



"We've had several customers say they're super-happy that we have it and that it seems to be easier to scan than the ones in Wal-Mart," says Davis.

Larsen says several retailers are interested in the system, but no date has been set for its rollout to the industry.

