

How Retailers can Plan Ahead for Stores Re-opening under a Progressive Easing of the Lockdown

With the UK high street still largely under lockdown, retailers have had to make decisions about what to do with IT systems – both software and hardware – within closed stores. In this article, we examine the activity retailers should be considering for the maintenance of IT systems during the prolonged period of closure, and the necessary steps to prepare systems and minimise risk during the anticipated easing of lockdown and a progressive reopening of stores.



From Tills Shutdown to Successful Switch-On

As retailers closed their stores and tills were shut down, correct steps and procedures were needed to retain IT systems integrity. It will have been important for systems documents and sales to be correctly processed and passed to head office servers. Any sales not checked in this manner and stuck at till or store level will unfortunately be lost following the extended period of shutdown.

It will also have been necessary to ensure that all databases were brought down gracefully, to minimise corruption and avoid a need for till rebuilds. When stores reopen, it's highly unlikely that tills can simply be restarted, and trading immediately begin. There will almost certainly need to be an advance period of maintenance and preparation to get store tills fully operational.

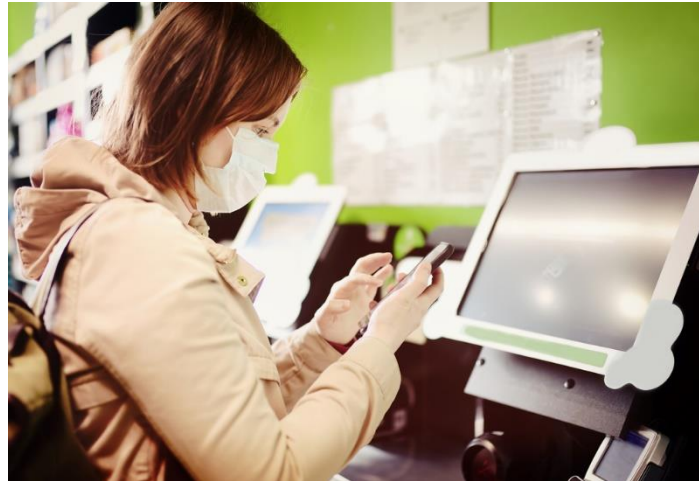
If head office merchandising teams are functional and online while stores are still closed, retailers can get ahead of the game in readiness for the re-opening of stores and for any promotions and product lines that need to be prepared.

The automated delivery of product and price information may still be continuing, which means messages, both static and dynamic, are still being generated and delivered to POS devices. So tills should be powered on ahead of stores re-opening. Failure to act in advance could leave tills non-functional when stores then open for the public.

Management of PEDs and other Mobile Store Devices

On April 1st, the contactless limit was raised from £30 to £45. There may well have been other PED updates available over the weeks of down time. Each PSP operates slightly differently but tills will need to be powered on and connected to the network to ensure that all relevant updates from the PSP can be received and updated.

If tills are not connected and are powered down, the PSP software will attempt to pick up the changes when it next communicates with the provider (be it overnight, or on the first transaction). Creditcall, TLG/Barclays and others will be managed by the EMAgent service which runs each day to pick up config changes, or will poll any updated configuration when it next goes online, as the historical configuration is cached in the Windows profile.



Stores shutting will have left mobile devices in store, in the hands of the staff, or left charging. These need monitoring, reviewing and asset management to ensure that they have not been mislaid, inappropriately taken or misused during this shutdown. Our suggestion would be a full health review conducted on the setup, health and usage of mobile devices to ensure a smooth return to service for the mobile devices in store.

Alongside the review, monitoring and alerting should be set up for usage and geolocation tracing of devices, to ensure that devices are where they are meant to be and when stores reopen there are no missing or misused devices.

Some mobile device management systems need maintenance and review to ensure easy resumption of normal use. For older setups with 30-day detachment from systems, devices may now be orphaned from the central systems. The 30-day detachment is important to consider as this will effectively make your mobile devices inoperable when stores reopen.

Opportunities for IT Housekeeping and Maintenance

For PMC customers, we are able to look after tills even when there is no-one in the store. If tills are on, we can manage regular reboots, checks, or call outs for outages. We are also able to check products are applied and prices updated, which will be important for reopening promotions.

Closed stores provide an opportunity to complete housekeeping and maintenance tasks on all point of sale devices and all store servers. Our support teams can perform a series of standardised health check steps, ensuring that the retail estate is ready for when a gradual easing of lockdown begins.

It would be advisable to clean up backed-up tables and to look at purging old data on audit and operational databases, which is something that cannot easily be done during trading and can improve the overall performance of crucial servers.

PMC would recommend re-indexing at all levels and ensuring database statistics are up to date. If central servers have remained operational it's vital the main database is still monitored correctly. Overall, this period of store closures is an opportunity to scope and carry out database enhancements and improvements in preparation for stores reopening.

Reopening of Stores with Minimised Risk



Store tills which have been powered down for an extended period of time will take significantly longer to be ready for trading. All devices should be powered up at least 5 days before trading is to start. This approach will ensure all outstanding messages are processed, all devices are in synch, online and reporting up to the Estate Manager. Test transactions should be performed at every POS, and PEDs checked for updates and readiness.

If the Estate Manager has been shut down and left offline there may well be an influx of messages waiting to be processed that will have come from the connected devices (i.e. tills). This will need to be carefully managed to ensure any backlogs are dealt with.

If the tills have been shut down and left offline, then there may be an influx of messages from the Estate Manager which will need to be processed. This may slow down the till for a while, depending on the quantity of messages.

Retailers will have mitigated IT system risks with careful planning ahead of store closures and during the lockdown period. For any retailers requiring additional help and expertise due to furloughed staff or loss of contractors, PMC can help by conducting a systems audit across closed stores in preparation for the easing of lockdown. As tills are switched back on, we can also run a complete health check for each store, across back-office servers and master tills, POS devices and peripherals - such as scanners and printers - and databases.

As the retail sector prepares for an easing of lockdown, our recommendations can inform critical decisions and mitigate risks for Retail IT systems. PMC provides end to end, Managed Services with 24/7 support for retailers and can provide expertise and resources in preparation for the successful re-opening of retail stores.

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