

What is a Cash Register?

Cash registers are machines that keep track of daily income, distribute change, and temporarily store currency. Moreover, they assist shop owners in managing their retail operations. Product pre-sets and other quick-key functions make transactions fast and efficient. All registers come with a removable, locking cash drawer, memory back-up protection, and the ability of automatic tax computation. They are excellent machines for both stationary and mobile businesses (flower shops and merchandise shops, for example) that involve the sale of merchandise.

Which Selection Criteria should You Use?

The number of items, clerks, and rate of inflows/outflows will determine which cash register is most suitable for a particular operation. The higher-end models have more reporting features, programmable functions, as well as more sophisticated printing and display capabilities.

To choose the right cash register, you will want to consider the following features:

Displays

Most cash registers have a front display for the operator and a rear display for the customer.

Some rear displays can be adjusted and rotated for convenient customer viewing. Higher-end models may have an alphanumeric front display, where the top line is alphanumeric and the bottom line is numeric only. The alphanumeric display shows item descriptions during sales registration and alphanumeric prompts during the program mode to assist the user with installation or in the selection of menu options.

Printers

Printers come in single, two, or alphanumeric stations and are connected to the register. Single-station printers only print out one paper tape that can be used either as a journal record or a customer receipt. However, some single-station printers print on two-ply paper providing both a receipt for the customer and a merchant copy (journal tape) for record keeping. Two-station printers can be found in more expensive models, where they provide a separate customer receipt and journal tape. In addition, printers come in 2 varieties, dot matrix and thermal. Dot matrix is required for 2-ply paper, whereas thermal printers deliver high speed and silent service.

Keyboards

Cash registers come with 3 keyboard variations – raised, flat, and touch screen.

A **raised keyboard** is similar to that of a PC. It is the optimal solution, if you plan to touch-type or want to enter large texts. Often, you can place plastic caps on these keys to place printed labels underneath. Good ECRs make it possible to program the keyboard to suit your style.

On the other hand, a **flat keyboard** protects against spills and crumbs. It is therefore ideal for the application in bakeries, restaurants, and other hospitality trades. Likewise, a good hospitality

cash register gives you the ability to program your own keyboard layout. You can thereby exchange the key labels, which usually consist of a printed page with keys on them. Moreover, it is possible to insert special items such as menus and linked PLUs more easily. Generally, hospitality cash registers come with 128 or 158 keys.

In addition to the standard keyboard, advanced ECRs make it possible to connect an external keyboard. For instance, you can then combine your built-in flat keyboard with an extra raised keyboard to input large amounts of text or make PLU modifications.

Finally, the most sophisticated cash registers (also known as POS systems) have touch screens. This technology allows you to interact with the display. The screen of the POS system provides a virtual keyboard. You then simply press the button on the screen as if it was real. Consequently, you get a user friendly interface, which provides maximum throughput. The user can easily maneuver through a vast selection of items via a series of menus that the register displays. You simply have to touch the items on the screen that you wish to select for the transaction. Furthermore, the enclosed nature of the touch screen protects your equipment from fluids and dirt.

Ultimately, your purchasing decision depends on your individual needs and requirements. The raised keyboard provides the ideal solution, if you intend to enter large amounts of information such as customer addresses or product text. Alternatively, the flat keyboard offers maximum reliability in a dusty or humid environment and offers an attractive, streamlined design. The touch screen solution therefore combines the best of both worlds and is your best bet, if your transactions require complex menu based item selections commonly found in restaurants, for instance.

Other Features

Departments

Departments are numbered keys on the keyboard that represent a grouping or category of items (such as dairy products). They can be used for quick and accurate entries of items sold, but are usually used for tracking and reporting. The number of departments ranges from 8 to 99.

Price Look-Ups (PLUs)

Commonly referred to as PLUs, these are numbers that can be programmed to represent merchandise or inventory. They are used for quick and accurate entry and tracking of frequently sold items. Once programmed, the user punches in the PLU code (e.g. 99) on the keypad and then presses the "PLU" button. The product's name and price and any other programmable information will immediately appear on the display. The number of PLUs can range from 1 to 30000 depending on the model. Certain models also allow the user to assign a name to each PLU number so that each selected item has a name, price, and description all at the touch of a button. This is a valuable feature for items with high turnover.

Clerk Identification System

Most models have a clerk ID security system that gives clerks an individual ID number allowing them to sign in and use the cash register. This system serves as a tracking and reporting feature for individual clerk sales.

Cash Drawers & Trays

All models come with at least 4 slots for coins and 4 slots for bills in the cash drawer. Higher-end models come with a few extra slot trays or an accessory drawer for additional storage of currency and/or checks.

Fiscal Law & Cash Registers

Occasionally, governments enforce a fiscal law that requires all taxpayers who generate sales from goods and services to record and use an approved fiscal system. Moreover, they are obligated to submit a receipt for their sales revenue. Cash registers generally undergo extensive tests and scrutiny before the government certifies that the till meets fiscal law standards/specifications.

Fiscal cash registers are electronic cash registers that are specially equipped with fiscal memory, fiscal screw plus seal, and the capability to simultaneously print receipt copies containing all sales data as well as the data appearing on the customer rolls. They also must have 2 displays – one for the operator and one for the customer. Business owners using a fiscal cash register may (with permission of the tax collection agency) issue a generated sales tax invoice that satisfies the government's fiscal stipulations.

Cash Register Vocabulary

- **Alphanumeric:** Used in both displays and printers; it allows both numbers and letters to be shown or printed
- **Automatic Tax Computation:** Allows the programming of different tax rates
- **Clerk Identification:** Assigns each user an ID number for security and monitoring of individual sales
- **Departments:** Numbered keys representing categories of products – dairy products, for instance, which can include cheese, milk, yogurt, etc
- **Display:** Shows the clerk and/or the customer the amount, and often the type of purchase
- **Touch Screen:** an interactive, virtual keyboard displayed on the screen of a cash register
- **Fiscal Cash Register:** A cash register that satisfies a government's fiscal (tax) laws
- **Fiscal Law:** A government's requirements to keep track of all sales generated revenue
- **Journal Tape:** A copy of the receipt for the merchant. Often used for tax purposes
- **Management Report Printing:** Provides periodic sales analysis by mid-day, end-of-day, week, and/or month
- **Price Look-Ups (PLU'S):** Numbers representing products used for entry and tracking
- **Secondary Charge Keys:** Allows the user to separate multiple credit cards or payment options such as checks.