

## New Ground

I remember going through the evolution of the scale and the scale/printer on this blog, sometime in the past.

I feel it might be relevant to revisit this topic briefly in light of some changes.

I recently had the opportunity to sell a well known food retailer in our area 16 new Hobart HTi scales. I was involved with the presale, sale, file and scale preparation, installation and training.

The biggest thing I came away from the entire experience is that a scale/printer is no longer just a scale/printer. Today's units basically consist of a pc, a weighing device and a thermal printer. The personality, the functionality, of the unit no longer comes from the pieces that make up the whole.

It's more of a virtual scale/printer. The entire package of features, benefits and capabilities we sell to our customer are actually the software and program that drive the mechanics of the machine. I can see now, that whatever capabilities the machine offers the customer are strictly a result of the code inside the drive.

The ability to have multiple pages of flash keys, to accept multiple sizes and styles of labels, etc. are all of the function of what a programmer had told the unit to do. This is similar to previous versions of scales but on those earlier models the instructions and functionality were on an embedded chip. Now it is loaded onto the hard drive.

The significant difference between now and then is that previously when Hobart added a new feature or functionality to an older unit, you had to order a new chip. You had to take off the old chip and replace with the new chip. You had to disassemble the machine, remove a circuit board and replace a chip. You always had the potential to blow a board, doing an upgrade.

With the new HTi , if we need to install an upgrade, we load it via a thumb drive. It is like getting an upgrade on your phone, sort of. If a customer has networked

scales and hosts them, upgrades can be down via FTP; with no hands on the scale itself.

It's pretty amazing because what we are transitioning to is no longer a hardware based machine. I imagine you can keep the box for years and years or until the software takes up more horsepower than the internal computer can provide. Upgrades to fix problems will be covered under warranty and contract. New feature sets will probably be sold in a fashion similar to computer software. You can buy version 2.0 or you can buy a license for an annual fee that gives you the latest version on an ongoing basis.

We aren't to this exact business model yet, but I can see it coming. My concern from a sales and service standpoint is that I will be kept out of that part of the revenue stream, if they figure out a way to sell new versions without the need for me and my techs.

On another scale/printer related note, I recently was made aware by a customer that the PA Department of Agriculture has implemented new rules effective, April, 2016.

Retailers selling meats, cheeses, etc in a service environment, cutting to order, slicing, weighing, packaging and labeling, now have to have ingredients and sub-ingredients for those products on a label on the package you give to the customer.

So if you own a store and sell a customer a pound of ham, sliced thin, the package now needs an ingredient label.

This is so new it hasn't been done in my career of 30 years. For every product sold, the retailer is either going to have to get ingredient labels from the product's manufacturer and put it on the package or program every product's ingredients into a scale with a printer capable of printing this information.

If Land O'Lakes, Bar S, Hormel or whoever don't provide labels, the retailer will have to get it on there somehow. This information is not readily available at this time and there no quick and easy methods to do it, but to hand program it. It

would take a competent scale operator 5 five minutes or more to add ingredients to an item. My average supermarket deli has 400 items. That 2000 minutes of labor or 33 hours, if they didn't do anything else; in which case, I think they would go insane. I think it would take months to do and multiple operators.

I think the large chains with their latest and greatest scales (Hobart HTi's), which are networked and have dedicated IT departments are probably on top of it, but it is still a multi-million dollar project for the Giant Eagle and Walmart's of the world.

Independent supermarkets and mom and pop stores are really going to be hurt by this. If you don't have a scale capable of printing this information, you are going to have to get one.

We will see what happens. I am not sure the industry is completely awake as to this new regulation and I am not sure the powers that be, understood the herculean task that they are asking of food retailers.

The only out I see is if the food manufacturer providing stickers as a stop gap solution.