

# Technology Facing a Reckoning

Love it or hate it, self-checkout is here to stay

(AP) — The promise of self-checkout was alluring: Customers could avoid long lines by scanning and bagging their own items, workers could be freed of doing those monotonous tasks themselves and retailers could save on labor costs. All that has happened since the rollout of self-checkout but so has this: Customers griping about clunky technology that spits out mysterious error codes, workers having to stand around and monitor both humans and machines, and retailers contending with theft.

“Going to the grocery store used to be simple, and now it’s frustrating,” said Cindy Whittington, 66, of Fairfax, Virginia. “You’re paying more. You’re working harder to pay for merchandise at their store. And it’s become an ordeal to check out. I should get a 5% discount.” In 2021, self-checkout usage represented 30% of transactions, almost double from 2018, ac-



Customers use self check out in New York. (AP Photo/ Beбето Matthews)

According to a survey of retailers by FMI, an industry group. And 96% of retailers surveyed offer self-checkout.

But the technology is also facing a reckoning amid the critical holiday shopping season. Some retailers are adding restrictions, while others are pulling out completely. This past fall, Walmart removed self-checkout

kiosks in three stores in Albuquerque, New Mexico as part of a location by location approach, but on the whole it is adding more than it is taking away. To reduce wait times, Target is now limiting the number of items to 10 that shoppers can scan in a handful of stores nationwide.

British supermarket chain Booths has been getting rid of

its self-checkout at the majority of its stores for the past 18 months in reaction to customer backlash. A year ago, grocery chain Wegmans, citing “losses,” discontinued its self-checkout app that lets shoppers scan and bag items while they shop. However, it continues to offer self-checkout registers at its stores. Self-checkout, first test-

ed in supermarkets in the late 1980s, gained momentum 20 years ago. But grocers ramped it up even more three years ago to address the pandemic-induced severe labor shortages.

Kroger, for example, has deployed artificial intelligence technology at a majority of stores that triggers alerts when something is amiss. For example, if a shopper fails to scan a particular item successfully, the system flags the error on the screen and prompts the customer to self-correct. If customers are unable to resolve the issue themselves, a light above the self-checkout blinks to attract workers’ attention. Still, for some workers who were supposed to be liberated from the monotonous task of ringing up customers, the tedium just comes in a different form.

Bernadette Christian, 59, a worker at Giant Food in Clinton, Maryland, mans six self-service stations at once, and she’s afraid to help or confront shoppers who she said have become angrier since the pandemic. “It would be easy for us to be cashiers, and it would be a lot more safer in today’s world,” she said.

## Breaking Ground on Year-Round Shelter and Access Center

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

the Oregon Community Foundation, Energy Trust of Oregon, Washington County Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) CareOregon, Just Compassion supporters, donors, and fundraisers.

Representative Dacia Grayber said, “Our guiding light in this process was to fund local projects that would provide the most support to those with the greatest need at this time. From supporting transitional housing development to funding food security programs, our offices are proud to have approached this process with equity, care, and compassion in mind. Oregon is on its way back, and as your state legislators we are committed to supporting our districts in transfor-

mative and equitable ways as we turn the page on the pandemic.”

“Washington County is dramatically increasing our community’s available shelter capacity,” said Washington County Chair Kathryn Harrington. “It is equally important that shelters are high quality, treat our shelter guests with dignity, and offer that steppingstone to long-term housing. This future shelter meets those immediate needs, while ensuring a future where program participants can thrive in stable housing.”

“The expanded Just Compassion Campus brings valuable and needed service capacity to Tigard,” explained Tigard Mayor Heidi Lueb. “By adding 60 shelter beds and a dedicated resource center, community members will have greater access to safe, stable places to sleep and

other supports than ever before. I’m proud to see the Tigard community taking major steps to achieve our Council Goal of reducing homelessness.”

“Today is a special day for Just Compassion as we begin to realize our vision,” said Just Compassion Executive Director Vernon Baker. “Our new shelter/access center will give us an opportunity to provide additional services and resources to our guests. With any great opportunity comes great responsibility. We look forward to being good stewards with the resources we are being provided and serving our guests.”

The Just Compassion Shelter site will be included within Washington County’s robust shelter program which currently offers over 400 beds/rooms of shelter county-wide.

## Portland Public Schools Superintendent Resigns

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

address those as thoughtfully as we can,” he said.

Guerrero also noted other improvements that helped vulnerable students, such as establishing the Center for Black Students and the new Multiple Pathways to Graduation building, which will open next fall, “for high schoolers who’ve struggled to find a foothold in traditional neighborhood schools.”

In some ways, Guerrero said, maybe he stayed in the job a little longer than he should have, “But I could see that there were these important remaining pieces that I don’t think would have been fair to saddle on a new superintendent,” he said.

For his next steps, Guerrero said he’ll take some time off before going onto another position, because he’s neglected his health and other personal areas.

“I have not been the best husband or father or uncle that I could have been these last few years,” he said. “I need time to detoxify, decompress and stare at



Superintendent Guerrero

the stars again,” he said.

His plan is to take his family on an extended road trip, particularly spending time in the deserts of the Southwest, and he’s waiting for the arrival of a vintage off-road 4x4 vehicle to use on the trip.

Guerrero said he is declaring his “free agency,” and that he’s not sure what he will do next.

“I’m sure that I will remain committed to serving inner city children, youth and families in some capacity,” he said. “I don’t know that it will be as a superintendent. Maybe, maybe not.”

Advertise with diversity in

The Portland Observer

Call 503-288-0033

or email [ads@portlandobserver.com](mailto:ads@portlandobserver.com)