

Interview with Matt Tormollen (DFS): “Technology creates an equal playing field”

We talk to Matt Tormollen, VP and General Manager of DFS Solutions, about the launch of the new DFS DX connected solutions platform, the digital transformation of the fuel and c-store industry, and how technology can create an equal playing field for retailers.



Matt Tormollen joined Dover Fueling Solutions as Vice President and General Manager in 2020. With more than 20 years in strategic executive leadership roles, Tormollen has held positions leading global research and development for Avalara and serving as President and CEO of FuelQuest.

Q. What is the roll out schedule for the new DFS DX connected solutions platform? Where do you plan to bring it initially?

A. The platform has been under development over the last couple of years in conjunction with our partner Microsoft. In each of the specific solution areas, we build the products from the ground up on the platform. Every one of those products is in some use with an independent, third-party customer. Two of the five DFS DX solutions are available now, with the remaining three to follow soon. Each solution will be formally released every couple of weeks and have supporting webinars for our customers.

It was very important to us that we build the platform to be local and international, particularly due to the footprint of DFS. It is difficult to build the products to all the global specifications from day one. Each of them have an initial region with a roadmap to expand them globally.

Q. How does this solution fit into the digital transformation of the fueling and retail industry?

We believe it is really important to look at the entire site, both at the forecourt and in the store. Our multi-year approach is to look at two fundamental areas we think are critical. Firstly, looking at asset optimization – what our customers would call a “single panel of glass” view across the whole site. We want to create a general solution that can monitor all the important site assets. In a way, that is different than using IoT and platform as a service. The next part is looking at the overall consumer experience, making it as simple as possible for the consumer to fuel, but also integrating their experience inside and outside the store more seamlessly.

Q. Integrating various companies under the Dover banner must have been a complicated process in terms of organizational and brand cohesion. Has that helped when creating an open platform such as this?

A. It is always a multi-year journey because technology is changing very quickly. We did have the benefit of integrating multiple companies and product lines together while we were conceiving the platform and the approach – that gave us more visibility into the diversity that we would see at the sites.



If we want to do asset optimization, it can't just be at the dispensers. And if we want to create an overall solution, it can't just be Wayne and Tokheim dispensers. There are a lot of interesting opportunities from an IoT perspective for that monitoring to transcend inside the store. We have had requests to monitor the coffee pots inside, because it's a high margin piece of equipment, and the retailer wants to know it is always operational.

Q. Is it now as important for retailers to be on top of their wetstock as much as the food and beverage inside the store? A sign of the transition we are in...

A. From asset optimization, it comes down to which of those assets are critical from a margin-generation or compliance standpoint. You can think of refrigeration systems and food prep monitoring. We prioritize those areas where margins are higher. Or those in a compliance scenario. When the consumers drive up, the more we can know about their preferences through loyalty programs and mobile apps, and the more we can enhance their experience at the pump. From a promotion standpoint, we only want to promote items that they care about. It translates to experiences they have in other walks of life, such as Netflix, which remembers your preferences. The promotion that happens at the pump should carry forward into the store. It could be presenting a QR code with the offer they just saw. We are trying to make the experience for the consumer more seamless to make that site the preferred option for the customer.

Q. Talking about the presence of media at the pump, do you feel like having that personalized interaction with the customer is what was missing for a more widespread adoption?

A. The situation at the pump also varies depending if it's self-service or attended. That plays into the opportuni-

ties you have from a media standpoint. Something consistent in all the dialogue that we have, regardless of the set-up at the forecourt, is that our customers want more multimedia. In North America, we have rolled out the Anthem UX User Experience – the 27-inch touch screen that allows for multiple elements such as stationary banners, active content and others. This is also part of our platform. We can look at other areas around the world to apply those concepts – a self-service kiosk, electronic advertisement, forecourts. We are having conversations about alternative screen formats and sizes for others parts of the world.

Q. With medium and large chains applying these connected systems that increase efficiency and sales, will small players find it harder and harder to compete?

A. What we have seen with Covid is that smaller site operators benefit more from having remote connectivity and cloud-based solutions. The ability to observe from your laptop versus driving to the various sites, it becomes more important. It is early days, but we have seen that even single site owners (with the new platform) are getting the benefit of that preferential consumer awareness. One of our clients has been using our multimedia and promotional platform, and he says it is the single biggest thing that has happened to him in 25 years of business. It actually creates an equal playing field. From a technological adoption point, it comes down to how aggressive you are with the application of it.

Q. You say that the platform has been built to enable third parties and easily integrate them. With convenience stores and gas stations adding more and more services to their premises (lockers, EV charging, product delivery), how challenging is that?

A. The idea of having this as an open solution was foundational for us. Technology is going to innovate very quickly, and it is difficult for any single provider to match all the innovations. That's why our partnership with Microsoft is so important.



Their Azure IoT Group has a strong focus on convenience retail, looking at this as an open ecosystem. As Azure, as cloud-to-cloud and as cloud-to-edge integration, there are various ways of looking at this. The first is third parties that are partners and work together to establish what are the integration points and use cases. That could be cloud-to-cloud with data, or it could be deploying a container into the Edge platform at the premise. We are exploring that today with partners. Then you have cloud-to-cloud, or cloud-to-edge integration with the customer. They want to make the most of data and applications. The third option is the furthest out – general open integration to the platform through a certification program for any interested party, more like a Google Store. First, we have to prove it with a smaller population before we can be generally available.

Part of what we do with Microsoft is working with proof of concept ecosystems where we play on the art of the possible. We think about how to get a cutting-edge technology from the Azure world and apply it in the fueling and retailing context. We are always keeping an eye on the future.

Interview by Oscar Smith Diamante for PetrolPLAZA