

Phoenix 3

A new version of Ranger's highly successful Phoenix sales reporting system is being distributed to independent music retailers throughout the UK. Phoenix allows barcode scans to be reported directly to Ranger's secure web server using an Internet connection and does not require any computer equipment in the shop in order to operate.

Most Phoenix systems are installed along with broadband access funded by UK chart compilers Millward Brown, so that there is no net cost to the retailer, apart from supplying a suitable telephone line. Indeed, the retailer is allowed to use the broadband connection for his own PC and so benefits considerably from the arrangement.

However, many retailers already have broadband connections and the new Phoenix version is optimised to work over existing networks, where the technical details of the broadband connection are often not available.

Oscar Touch

Oscar Touch is the latest version of Ranger's Oscar point of sale system. It is quite different to earlier generations of Oscar because it features an integrated touch screen terminal for ease of use and also for saving critical counter space.

All Oscar operations can be conducted simply by touching the appropriate on screen buttons and selecting from a 'soft' keyboard that appears whenever numerical or text entry is required.

The new unit is based on an Intel 'Atom' CPU chip and runs the reliable Windows XP operating system. It is supplied complete with a miniaturised keyboard, receipt printer, barcode scanner, mouse and slimline cash drawer. The software supplied includes the latest Oscar Version 3, remote control and diagnostic software for support, anti-virus protection, automatic backup routines, communications system for catalogue updating and chart reporting and a host of other facilities.

The new terminal incorporates a fast and accurate touch panel that can be operated either by a light finger touch or by the supplied stylus, which neatly slots into the unit's supplied keyboard.

Of course, operators can still enter data via the conventional keyboard if preferred!



Ranger's new touch screen sales terminal features compact design, slim line cash drawer and POS keyboard.

Raid Watch

All Oscar systems have extensive precautions to protect users' data in the event of hard disk failure, including automatic backup processes that copy data to CD media and in the case of network systems to other Oscar units. These strategies mean that the retailers crucial data, often including several years of trading records, are usually protected against simple technical failure.

While hard drive failures are rare, they can happen and Ranger's latest Oscar Server provides network systems with greatly improved resilience, redundancy and data security using a system called RAID (Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks). Here's how it works:

The new server contains not one, but two hard drives. Special circuitry built into the system's Intel motherboard copies all incoming data simultaneously to both drives, ensuring that there is always a duplicate copy available in real time. The system also continuously monitors the disk drives and checks that they are identical. Any discrepancies, which might indicate an impending drive failure, are instantly detected.

When a disk error is detected, the server automatically isolates the faulty drive and continues operating from the good copy without any interruption. Traditional RAID servers display warning messages on a dedicated screen but in the retail environment it is unlikely that staff will be aware of this, meaning that the server is likely to continue operating until another, fatal, failure occurs!

To overcome this retail specific problem, Ranger have produced a special monitoring system, 'RaidWatch', to monitor the health of the disk array and alert staff at the retail site and at Ranger about errors. An audible warning, requiring a password for cancellation, alerts staff to the problem and emails are automatically generated for Ranger support staff with technical details about what has occurred.

In the new server, the hard disk drives are installed in panel mounted trays, or 'caddies', so that they can be changed without dismantling or even powering down the machine. This means that a faulty disk can be removed in seconds and replaced with a good unit. When the faulty disk is replaced, the Server's operating system automatically creates a carbon copy of the good data on to it so that, within a short time, the system once again has full redundancy.

This redundancy feature means that the user can instantly file a physical archive of the data simply by removing one of the disks and replacing it with a new one! The pricing of today's hard drives means that the cost of an archived disk is similar to that of a backup tape but without any of the uncertainties about whether the tape would actually work if it were needed. The Ranger RAID server is available now for new systems and as an affordable upgrade to existing installations.



The new Raid server features removable disk drive caddies.



If you would like to see a no-obligation demonstration of Oscar at your location, please contact Ranger for an appointment

RANGER

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New Record Charts for Finland • Oscar 3.0 • A new Window opens in Newcastle
New Oscar Reporter • Phoenix 3 • Touch Screen Oscar • Raid Watch

New Record Chart System For Finland



The important Finnish music market is here represented by two times Emma-winner and female artist of the year Anna Abreu at the Emma awards held in March 2009 in Helsinki. (picture by Tomi Palsa)

The IFPI (International Federation of Phonographic Industries) in Helsinki, Finland have selected Ranger Computers Ltd to provide a new record chart system recording the sales of music products in Finland. The new system will run for an initial period of two years and will provide IFPI for the first time with a mechanism to accurately capture actual retailer sales as they occur.

The new system is the first application for Ranger's 'Ultimate' sales recording technology and represents a considerable step forward from traditional data capture systems. Ultimate captures sales in independent stores in real time using Ranger's new 'Otis' wireless barcode scanner and compiles chart results online, using a secure web server.

Phoenix/Otis has been under development for several years and is based on Ranger's highly successful 'Phoenix' broadband barcode scanner, which is deployed widely in the UK. Phoenix/Otis operates over the cellular telephone network and frees the retailer from the expensive installation, wiring and connection issues normally associated with POS terminals.

Additional information feeds from multiple retailer's own POS systems are incorporated into the data to build up a comprehensive and reliable picture of actual retail sales of recorded music throughout the country. The Ultimate system analyses the sales recorded by barcode scanning using data based on the UK's OCC (The Official UK Chart Company) Official Music Catalogue and merges this information with data supplied by a variety of Scandinavian distributors.

Mr Tommi Kyyrä, Deputy Director of IFPI Finland said "The new 'Ultimate' chart system represents a considerable step forward for the record chart process in Finland. The new charts will be fast, efficient and reliable, meaning that broadcasters, record companies and other interested parties will be able to access them easily in the knowledge that the data content is an actual measurement, rather than an estimate, of recorded music sales in Finland"

Ranger has provided chart data capture services in the UK and other countries since 1993 and is the primary supplier of independent retailer sales data in the UK for OCC's Official UK Charts. The company also distributes OCC's official music catalogue to independent retailers and other users in the UK and elsewhere.



Ranger's new Phoenix/Otis barcode scanner uses the cell phone network to report sales data directly to Ranger's web servers. No wiring, installation or network connection are required, making Phoenix/Otis suitable for use even in stores without IT infrastructure.

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Oscar 3.0

Ranger Computers have announced a major upgrade to the Oscar system designed for retailers selling major items, including musical instruments.

New facilities in the new software include:

- Customer account details, including pre-payments
- Support for non-barcoded items using SKU codes in place of EAN barcodes
- Improved file import facilities allowing easy incorporation of supplier's data into Oscar
- Serial Number recording
- Improved reporting

The new Oscar software, known as Oscar 3.0, is available in new systems and also as an upgrade for existing Oscar systems (hardware upgrade may also be required).

Line Item Discounting

Discount can be applied directly to each line on a sales invoice. When a cashier enters a discount amount, either as a percentage or as a value, that amount is removed from the selling price of the product or products on the currently selected line in the sales invoice. The 'sold at' price is determined directly as a result of the line discount and recorded for each line in each sale, making accurate reporting of the margin in individual sales possible.

New Customer Functions

Loyalty discount

Oscar supports a percentage discount loyalty card scheme. Configuration settings determine whether, if an operator has already manually applied a discount to a line item, Oscar will action the larger of the two discount figures.

Customer part payment

It is now possible to record additional payments. The customer order details are amended to show the new outstanding balance and the customer's history includes details of the extra payments made.

Database export

Details of customer orders, qualified with a date range, may be exported to either an XML 1.0 (fourth edition) file or a 'CSV' text file.

For each order, the file contains:-

1. Customer name, address, contact information and mailing preference
2. Full product details
3. All options selected by the cashier at the time of the order

New customer search features

Extra search options available from the 'Main Menu' allow an operator to find the details of a particular sale. A product barcode and/or a sales date may be used to display a list of all sales meeting the search criteria.

Cataloguing of non-barcoded product

Although barcoding is fundamental to proper operation of EPOS systems, there are many circumstances where supplier's catalogues of product still lack essential barcode information. In these cases it might still be beneficial to allow importing of the available data, allowing till operators to match up product descriptions with barcodes at goods inwards or even at the point of sale.

To enable this information to be imported into Oscar, two additional facilities are provided.

Catalogue Import

Oscar attempts to match an existing product by 'supplier' and 'catalogue number' before determining that the product is 'new'.

Barcode Matching

Later, the 'true' barcode may become known. A barcode change utility allows the selection of an existing product by searching against catalogue number, artist or title and the addition of the 'true' barcode.

New Customer Reports

Ranger's Oscar POS system uses a built in reporting engine, 'Oscar Reporter', to extract user data from the millions of items that each system records and present meaningful information to managers and business owners. The latest version of Oscar Reporter, included in Oscar 3.0, adds the following facilities:

During the design or modification of any report, the following may always be defined:-

1. If a customer name is included, any details recorded about the customer may be included
2. If purchase history is included, filtering by any field in the product database, by a date range and by the retail outlet from where the product was sold may be specified
3. The contents of any column may determine the order of the results

These are some examples of reports using the new facilities:-

1. Customers who purchased a particular product, with serial numbers if applicable
2. Customers who purchased particular product types
3. Product for which a deposit has been left and a balance is outstanding
4. Customers settling an outstanding balance
5. Customers with a deposit against a product and a balance outstanding
6. Potential 'duplicate customer' report
7. Serialized product, including booked in date and buy price

A New Window Opens In Newcastle

World famous music retailer JG Windows Ltd has recently installed Ranger's Oscar POS system in their new 3,500 square foot store in Gateshead's Metro Centre, in the North-East of England.

The takeover will add a second retail outlet to the company's portfolio – in 2008, it celebrated a century of trading in the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne. JG Windows is the North East's largest music store, selling musical instruments, printed music, CDs/DVDs and HiFi across three floors and uses Ranger's Oscar POS system throughout.

Rupert Bradbury, the store's managing director, explains: "When we purchased the city centre store from the Windows family in 2006, and with my background at Roland, not least in running the digital piano concessions within department stores, we knew that at some point we must take our business well and truly to the consumer market. The Metro Centre has always been in our sights as it is only 15 minutes from our city centre store and has 23 million visitors a year, of which many do not shop in Newcastle City Centre".

"The Windows name is very strong in the North East, with most people from all generations having bought something from the store at some point in their life, and so this is a natural progression for us," added Bradbury.

"The current economic situation makes this even more exciting and in my opinion an even greater opportunity for customers, for suppliers and for our staff. There are obvious economies of scale to be made, not least with the television advertising we run throughout the year on ITV now being able to direct customers to two locations".



JG Windows' new shop in the Metro Centre, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear UK uses Oscar to streamline inventory management and record accurate sales data.

Serial Number Tracking

This new feature allows individual products to be tracked by Serial Number throughout the Oscar system. The 'Serial Number' property of a product determines what additional action is required whenever the stock level of that product is changed.

Serial Numbers property can be 'not present', 'optional' or 'required'. A Serial Number can be searched for and corrected if that item remains in stock – once sold, the Serial Number is fixed.

Serial Numbers, if present, are automatically included on printouts generated as a result of an invoice (sales receipt, delivery/consignment note). The 'Stock History Summary' panel on Oscar's main screen (bottom left, blue tab) identifies the Serial Number of each product for any transaction.

New Oscar Reporter

The power and flexibility of Oscar's reporting engine has always been a major strength of the system and the latest version of Reporter, included in Oscar 3.0, provides new and enhanced facilities.

The key to Oscar Reporter is the ability to include in reports any of the 100 or so pieces of information that is recorded for every line item at the time of sale, stock movement or other activity. Crucially, this information contains a complete 'snapshot' of the product as it was at the time of sale, including even the historical rolling average purchase costs of the individual items at that moment in time!

The new version of reporter makes it even easier to organise this wealth of information into meaningful results by, as an example, listing the precise purchase cost of an item or group of items beside the actual achieved selling price of the items. Using this data, Oscar is able to calculate sales mark-ups, margins and percentages for the stores trade on the basis of lines from individual suppliers, on the basis of time, date, category of product or indeed just about any other analysis that the retailer may require.

A unique feature of Reporter is its ability to save both report designs and the actual reports in a directory style presentation, making it easy to go back to previous reports or equally, to make small changes to report design and quickly review the usefulness of the result.