



Top 10 tips when buying a barcode scanner

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About Rugged and Mobile

What do we do?

Rugged and Mobile develops mobile, data and web solutions, delivering into the rugged, enterprise and consumer mobile markets. Offering end to end solutions our services include:

- Hardware reselling of rugged and mobile devices, selling anything from barcode readers to Windows mobile phones and supporting them.
- Bespoke software consultancy, delivering tailored software and project management into businesses. We deliver both Microsoft and Apple iPhone solutions.
- SOA/SaaS solutions, serving businesses and individual customers with new, exciting and flexible mobile services.

Our Culture

Rugged and Mobile is a newly founded company. We understand how to run a tech company right and how to treat the people within it. We work hard, we play hard and mostly the two are the same thing!

Company Vision

We want to become the leading UK provider of mobile solutions. We intend to do this by keeping at the forefront of mobile and data capture technologies, by providing excellent service to our customers and by employing the right people who can help deliver our vision.



The world of barcodes can at best be a very confusing subject and making the right decision when buying the right barcode hardware for your business can be a road littered with potential issues. A leap of faith by you, the customer is often required at some point and this article gives you 9 quick lessons to think about when buying your hardware and hopefully makes that leap of faith a small confident step rather than a huge leap!

If you can take just a couple of pointers from this article you will save yourself a lot of grief that could also cost you a lot of time and money.

Tip 1 - Reseller Impartiality

Some resellers have ties with certain products or manufacturers and all they want to do is push these products, making huge margins at the expense of their customers who more often than not come unstuck at some point with the wrong hardware. They might be a UK distributor for a certain manufacturer, they might get preference due to sales of certain equipment or they might have other reasons to peddle something that benefits them and not necessarily you.

I hate selling unethically like this and just because the customer hasn't asked the right questions, doesn't mean it's OK.

When it comes to the big manufacturers, Motorola, HHP, Honeywell, Intermec etc, then it's less likely that anything suspect is going on because they run tight ships for the benefit of the honest reseller and their customers. If a piece of kit is put in front of you from some Korean or Chinese based manufacturer you've never heard of before then beware because it often brings a whole host of problems with it too.

Ask if they sell to resellers or have any ties with manufacturers or distribution partners as this is a giveaway and also ask plainly if they import or distribute on behalf of the manufacturer.

I want to leave it there on this lesson, but just be aware that I have seen countless companies come unstuck later on because they got pushed into a piece of equipment that looks good in an office but in the real world was never going to work for them. One company I worked for in the past peddled a certain manufacturer like this when they couldn't even get the sales dept to ring them back within 48 hours! Don't even ask me about the level of support they offered and we wouldn't have a manufacturer on our lists who offered this level of service. If in doubt pose the question in our forums, ask us or even email/phone the manufacturer's sales departments yourself. If their sales teams take 24 hours to get back to you then what is the support going to be like?



Tip 2 - Barcode compatibility

Pretty obvious I hear you say but believe me a lot of people have come unstuck on this. You need to ensure that the scanner will scan the barcodes you need it to so buying a 1D Laser scanner is simply not going to work on many 2D barcodes. Likewise I see so many people double their costs immediately buying 2D scanners and never using them on anything but 1D barcodes where they can often underperform laser scanners. Its horses for courses here so make sure you buy what you actually need! If in doubt try and evaluate the product.....

Tip 3 – Evaluate

If you're buying a fair few scanners then ask your reseller if they will send you an evaluation unit. For the cost of a bit of postage you'll be able to play with the unit in the situation it will be used in which will not only uncover any potential pitfalls but also give you the ability to get feedback from your users as well. This brings me onto my next tip...

Tip 4 – Get user feedback

Your users are often a sticking point with any solution and make sure you take into account their thoughts and feedback. The most successful solutions we deliver are when the customer has a user involved in their project who is fully committed to evaluating and spending the time getting the right product for their business.

Doing this will also enable you to ask better questions when talking to resellers, focussing in on the right product for you.

Tip 5 - IP rated does not necessarily mean rugged to you

We have another article on ruggedness. Search our blog for the term "Rugged." The common mistake people make here is that they think an IP rated device makes it tough! Remember that IP rating is about dust and water resistance not about how far you can drop it or how many times you can drive over it with a fork lift truck before breaking it (that's usually only once by the way!!). Ask about drop specs too. Although manufacturers don't have a standard way to measure this, most do drop test on solid concrete and give you the height it is tested from.

Another word of warning here is that this is not about a warranty/support issue and many buyers come with the wrong mind-set on ruggedness. Manufacturers have no way of determining whether you have dropped a 1.5m drop specified device from 1.8m! It's about what you are likely to be doing and how disruptive to your business having a device repaired or replaced is to your business. If you are working up ladders then get something that can be dropped from 1.8m+, if you're working on the ground then 0.9m is often enough.

Tip 6 - Tethered or Wireless

Not an obvious one this, but going wireless is not always the best route. There's no doubt about it that wireless scanners are great and can offer huge benefits. However wireless freedom and battery life is often a delicate balance and believe me, your users will not use



that charging cradle like you think they will!! Batteries are also an extra consumable that will require replacement at some stage dependant on usage.

Also consider your environment and the potential interference you might already have. Wi-Fi based scanners are great because you can use them often reliably over 100m ranges, but if there's already other Wi-Fi networks around, or perhaps other manufacturer scanners working along-side each other, then they can interfere with each other. At best you need someone who can configure Wi-Fi correctly. At worst interference will repeatedly bring your network down.

There are also other ways at minimising this. You could use a Bluetooth scanner but range is often the loser here. Some manufacturers offer their own proprietary systems, based on Wi-Fi but better at dealing with interference.

It also brings new considerations with it such as what your software solution will do if a scan is dropped mid-way through or when the scanner goes out of range. A lot of companies buy new scanners, going wireless and realise that their proprietary software solution is not built for these eventualities, causing huge problems.

Get a site survey first if in doubt, talk to your reseller and try to get them onsite to take a look around.

Tip 7 - Batching data and scanner functionality

Another consideration is how connected you want your users to be to your systems. Most scanners don't have memory and need to pass the barcode straight into your system, much like a tethered shop/EPOS handheld barcode scanner. Some will store data on them so your users can scan multiple barcodes and then upload data in a batch fashion. This can work for warehouse pickers or in areas where you know they will be out of range for periods of time.

If you need more, say some kind of functionality on the device itself then considering a batch scanner with Windows C.E. on it might be appropriate or indeed going the whole way and looking at the PDA/Handheld's on offer that offer fully blown Microsoft Windows Mobile or CE operating systems and can handle fully blown applications. You see supermarket's using MC9000's and MC70's like this on their shop floor.

Tip 8 - Configuration

This isn't the biggest consideration but you do want to ease the configuration process, especially if you have a need to configure your scanners with a proprietary system. Most scanners come with scan sheets that will configure them correctly and you might be lucky enough to be able to use your scanners out of the box but time after time customers will buy scanners and realise that they do not work with their Nixdorf or IBM backend without complicated configuration. Make sure you mention your needs early on as it might also restrict the type of scanner that you can buy.



We offer a configuration service to our customers but we then store this information in your support area so that we do it once for you and you have the ability to do it later yourself.

Tip 9 - The cost Vs Value pitfalls

I cannot stress this enough!! It is a tight market we operate in and margins are ever under threat. Getting a device at lowest cost is always going to be a pressure for you but always look at overall costs.

Who looks like they will support you best? Is your reseller eager to work with you after the sale, do they seem happy to chat to you when you ring or email and do they respond quickly? Don't forget that dealing with the big resellers might shave a few pounds off your price but it may also mean you will be a small customer who will not get the same attention as you would get with a slightly smaller reseller. I have even heard of resellers selling at under cost price just to get the business, which is not only illegal but you are also working with someone who is cost and not service based. Just watch your business suffer as you find they can't support you or offer the service you need.

The world is changing and service and support should be at the heart of what you and your reseller do.

We're passionate about what we do here and a problem here is like a challenge to us and once you're with us you'll see a community of people as well as trained staff that can help us get answers quickly.

Tip 10 - When it all goes wrong

The last area I wanted to mention is support. Remember that warranty and support are very different animals and increasingly if you do not buy support then manufacturers and resellers will not take you seriously when you inevitably have a problem. Why should they take your business seriously when you aren't?

The best resellers, like us, will always give you your support options and will always talk to you on a service level rather than a cost level. Make sure you give your business the best chance of survival and in turn give your customers the best service you can. You can only do this if you protect your hardware from the eventualities that WILL happen. You can't stop people from losing or breaking devices and devices in the field will get stolen.

Rugged and Mobile has a fantastic core support product that blends with manufactures offerings and most importantly is designed to keep you running.

Make sure you have the support conversation and remember you ultimately get what you pay for!!



rugged hardware, solid service

rugged and mobile

There we have it, 9 tips that will hopefully help you when you're buying your next equipment. There are of course many other things you need to talk about but these should get you asking the right kinds of questions and should stimulate the right reseller into understand your business.

