

Kroger's latest weapon in tackling queues at the checkouts with Irisys



Finance/Kroger - At this Cincinnati Kroger, supervisors monitor a system that says how many lanes need to be open and how many will be needed in 30 minutes. (Kroger

Supermarket giant Kroger Co. ([KR](#)) is winning the war against lengthy checkout lines with a powerful weapon: infrared cameras long used by the military and law-enforcement to track people.

These cameras, which detect body heat, sit at the entrances and above cash registers at most of Kroger's roughly 2,400 stores. Paired with Irisys' Predictive software that determines the number of lanes that need to be open, the technology has reduced the customer's average wait time to 26 seconds. That compares with an average of four minutes before Kroger began installing the cameras in 2010.

"The technology enabled us to execute at the front of the store without that additional (labor) expense," said Marnette Perry, senior vice president of retail operations for Kroger.

Reducing wait times is becoming a top priority for retailers, from high-end department stores to hardware chains to fast-food outlets. Battling both online rivals that offer at-home convenience and intensifying competition among fellow brick-and-mortar outlets, many companies see enhancing the shopping experience as a way to build loyalty.

"Since the checkout is the last experience in a store, if it's a bad experience, you'll probably see that financially," says Kurt Kendall, retail strategist with Kurt Salmon, a management consulting firm. "Retailers could speed up their service if they fully staffed their lanes, but they are trying not to staff all their checkout locations. This is the dirty little secret."

Other retailers and restaurant chains are experimenting with technologies to speed up service.