

Buyers register approval of voice

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Behind every successful talking cash register ...

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You're standing at the checkout counter, craving sleep, waiting to pay for a few days' worth of yogurt, and then you hear the voice. It could be the cashier, but it's not. It's too regulated, too mature to be the high school kid ringing up the six-pack ahead of you on the conveyor.

You hear the same pleasant voice announcing the price of apples in one lane, dog food in another, paper towels in the express.

You're sophisticated. It's the 1980's. You notice a rectangular box on a pole connected to the modified, smaller-than-usual, beige cash register. The clerk slides your four cartons past the electric eye's laser beam and you hear it, like a digitalized mantra: *Fifty-nine, fifty-nine, fifty-nine, fifty-nine*. At the same time, a board above the speaker box lights up, showing the price and spelling out "yogurt" in bright blue block letters.

The bag boy hands you an ordinary brown grocery sack and you walk out of the store, leaving behind a rapidly-fading chorus of synthesized voices.

This has been the scene since late December at the Grand Union store at 10720 Sunset Drive.... Grand Union's machines are manufactured by National Semiconductor Corp. of Santa Clara, Calif., the pioneer in talking registers.

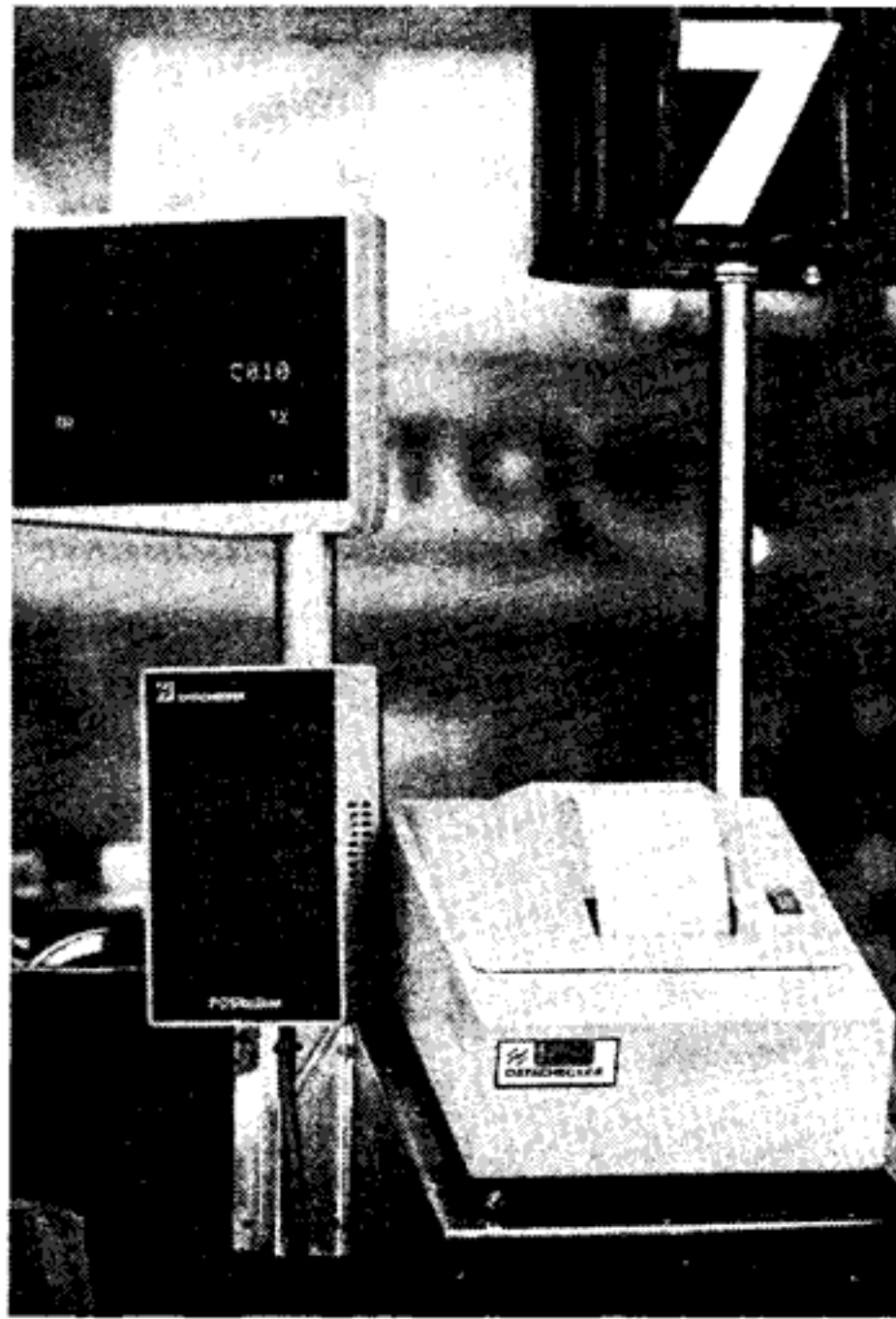
Grand Union's customer surveys show 99 percent of their shoppers like the talking registers....

Some gave responses that would make National Semiconductor proud. "I think it's just great," said Rich Demott, 62. "I like the fact that it's so accurate."

Two younger shoppers said they find something to buy at Grand Union sometimes three times a day, now that the register talks...

The story of the POSItalker (point of sale voice synthesizer) begins in the basement of the home of an astrophysics professor at the University of California at Berkeley. About 10 years ago, the professor, Forrest Mozer, figured an electronics revolution was in the offing and decided the best way for humans to "interface" with the machines would be through talking. He later taught a graduate student who was blind, which gave him a personal incentive to work on a talking, hand-held calculator.

So Mozer, working on what he insists is only a hobby, developed a way to put the human voice on a computer chip. First he records the voice into a microphone that omits some sounds such as sibilant S's, digitalizes it (converts it to ones and zeros on the computer) and stores



C.W. Griffin/Miami Herald Staff

Here she is: the POSItalker, or Polly as she is sometimes known.

it in a tiny silicon computer chip. He has patented the process. Other inventors have devised similar processes.

One of Mozer's clients is National Semiconductor. Two summers ago, after the company had decided it wanted talking registers, Mozer went to work. Using National's criteria—a warm, motherly, not-too-sexy voice—he chose Joan Kenley's voice from the demo reels sent to him by San Francisco's Brebner Agency.

Known as the Kaleidoscopic Voice, she is one of the Bay Area's top female voice-overs. Her vocal talents have landed her assignments that range from an animated mouse to a lady CB trucker. Some of her many commercials include Coke, Zest, Macy's, Visa, Bruener's, RCA Videodiscs, Hibernia Bank, Emporium-Capwell, Lincoln Mercury, Citicorp Savings and Chevrolet.

Kenley was trained as an actress and performed on the New York stage. She appeared locally as the princess in *Call Me Madam* with Ethel Merman in 1968 in Fort Lauderdale and Coconut Grove. In 1969 she returned to Florida as a featured performer on one of Jackie Gleason's televised "Honeymooner" segments.

Joan also has her Ph.D. in the field of psychology and works privately with clients as a voice coach/therapist. When she was president of Showcom in New York City in the 70's, her industrial communications company served clients which included Texaco, Armstrong Cork, Allied Chemical and Johns-Manville.

Her newest project is writing a book about her method of releasing and developing what she calls the "BodyVoice." This is how she wants to be remembered—not for being the first anonymous voice to continually announce the price of peas!

And while some customers even suspect the voice is really a mass of computer made sounds, cashiers like Betty Nunez, 17, have used their imaginations to humanize the POSItalker. "I think she's a blonde with short wavy hair, sort of like Erma Brombeck," Nunez said.

That description, repeated to Kenley, made her laugh—a full deep laugh that came clearly through the 3,000 miles of telephone wires, a laugh you could almost imagine a cash register making. But not quite.



Kenley: voice of peas and pennies

**... there's
a
real,
live
person.**