

Systems

This section details the underlying systems that drive gameplay, narrative, and player interaction in the shopkeeper simulation. It covers how **quests**, **sales flows**, and **shop management tools** interconnect to create a living, responsive station environment. Players guide the movement of stock from ordering to display, oversee customer interactions, and maintain reputation through both automated and hands-on management, while the quest system provides flexible narrative beats that ripple across the station. Supporting tools — including the **Shop Terminal** and personal **PDA/Sideband** — give players the means to track official operations, private observations, and ongoing story threads, ensuring that every decision, conversation, and display choice has meaningful impact within a cohesive, immersive system.

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Quests

Quests are the engine that drive all narrative and timed events on the station — from long-form Patron arcs to small incidents like shipment delays or a visiting celebrity. They are **structured as staged timelines**, but instead of rigid “missions,” they are flexible story controllers that can touch many different parts of the station’s life.

How Quests Work

- **State Machine Core** – Every quest is made up of a set of numbered **stages**. Each stage represents a specific point in the quest’s progress — an active situation, a waiting period, or a completed outcome.
- **Script-Per-Stage Logic** – Each stage can have its own script that runs when the quest enters that stage. These scripts can:
 - Trigger dialogue
 - Cause environmental changes
 - Update the Story Ledger
 - Prompt other systems to react (delayed ship arrivals, new bulletin posts, special customer visits, changes in available goods)
- **Flexible Flow** – Stages do not need to happen in strict order; they can branch, skip, or loop depending on story needs or player actions.

Scope of a Quest

A quest can be:

- A **Patron Story Arc** that progresses across many visits
- A **Station-Wide Event** like a festival, docking delay, or power outage
- A **Small Favor or Request** such as sourcing a special item
- A **Recurring Situation** that can happen multiple times in different forms (e.g., supply shortages)
- A **World-Driven Unlock** – expanding what’s available to the player, such as:
 - Adding a new decorative item, fixture, or product into the shop’s **storage** as a reward
 - Unlocking a new product, style, or furnishing in the **ordering system**

What Quests Affect

Quests never “hard-wire” themselves into other systems — instead:

- The **Quest System** only tracks current stage and conditions
- The **Quest Stage Script** is what reaches out to other systems, asking them to change state or display something new
- Other systems (Shop Terminal, Space Station Systems, Customers, PDA) simply respond in their own way to the requested change
- This keeps each system self-contained, but lets quests weave them together

Example Flow

1. **Quest:** *Docking Delay Mystery*
Stage 10: “Announcement Made”
2. The Quest System moves to Stage 10 after necessary conditions are met (time of day, certain Patron visit, rumor overheard)
3. **Stage 10 Script** runs:
 - Tells Station Announcements to broadcast a delay notice
 - Updates the Docking Registry with new arrival time
 - Leaves a note in the Story Ledger
 - **Adds “Ore Sample” to shop storage** as a gift from a prospector, or enables ordering it from suppliers going forward
4. Station Systems and shop life change naturally as a result — quieter foot traffic, certain customers commenting — without the Quest System directly running them.

For Artists and Narrative

- A “quest” might require new **visual moments**: lighting changes, props appearing/disappearing, special NPC outfits, or environmental cues that signal an event is happening
- Treat quests as **story containers** — each stage is a place where you can build a vignette, create ambience, or drop story hints that players can notice in passing
- Unlocks that expand what the player can place or order should be framed as **natural rewards**: gifts left in storage, new stock arriving, or contacts offering fresh catalogue entries

Design Goals

- Keep quests **decoupled** from core mechanics so they can be reused across multiple projects
- Allow **script flexibility** at each stage to tie in different systems without forcing changes to those systems

- Make it easy for artists and narrative to **attach atmosphere and detail** to specific moments in a quest
- Treat “upgrades” as **world-driven availability expansions**, not abstract menus or skill trees
- Ensure the **Story Ledger** remains the player’s in-world quest log, showing progress, clues, and outcomes without breaking the immersive style

Sales Flow

The complete gameplay loop follows the journey of every product, from the moment you place an order to when it finally finds its way into a customer's hands. It begins with selecting and purchasing stock, which is delivered to your back-room storage. From there, you choose what to move onto your shop's displays, arranging shelves and fixtures to meet the needs of whoever is likely to dock at the station next. Once items are on display, customers browse, select what they need, and complete their purchases, directly impacting your revenue and reputation.

Each step of this process is designed to work together seamlessly, creating a sense of immersion without bogging the game down with unnecessary complexity or technical strain. By carefully managing ordering, storage, display layout, and stock availability, you not only keep your shop running smoothly but also help shape the rhythm of daily life on the station.

Storage Inventory

Holds all owned stock not currently on display. Tracked as a logical list and visually represented in the back stock room using token props.

- **Logical Storage List:** Main record of all items owned, viewable via the terminal.
- **Stock Room Tokens:** Each product type has a fixed slot in the stock room with a single representative mesh ("token").
 - Appears when at least one unit is in storage; disappears or swaps to "empty" state when 0 remain.
 - Optional: token upgrades based on quantity (small box → full crate → pallet).
- **Performance Safe:** Tokens are static props, not individual physical items.
- **At-a-Glance Status:** Player can gauge supply by walking into the stock room.

Displays & Display Inventories

Each shop display fixture has its own inventory list, separate from storage. Visuals change to match items assigned to that display.

- **Dedicated Inventory Per Fixture:** Fruit Stand, Tool Rack, Snack Shelf, etc.
- **Sale-Only Stock:** Customers can only buy what's on displays.
- **Stock Dependency:** Manual stocking and auto-fill both require items to be present in storage — if storage is empty, displays cannot restock.

- **Manual Placement:** Player chooses which storage items to move into displays. Manual stocking is immediate (short in-world restocker animation) and happens exactly when the player decides.
- **Auto-Fill Option (per display):** When enabled, the display pulls from storage automatically based on a saved loadout, but changes apply on a scheduled refresh cycle to reflect automation timing. Complex/bulky goods can take longer to appear.
- **Default Loadouts:** Each display can have a baseline inventory configuration that automation maintains whenever stock is available.
- **Preset Loadouts / Templates:** Player can save named loadouts for a display type and quickly assign them to other displays of the same type.
- **Manual Override:** Player can override a display's default or template at any time for immediate changes, ideal for reacting to events or adjusting to customer needs.
- **Display Roles/Priorities:** Assign a role (e.g., High Margin, Popular Snacks) to influence automation decisions on which items are stocked first when supply is limited.
- **Visual Representation:** Models/meshes swap or enable props based on what's in the list (no per-unit spawning).

Ordering & Restocking

Players replenish storage by placing orders via the terminal's Shipment Management tool.

- **Order via Terminal:** Use Shipment Management to select items, quantities, and suppliers from a unified ordering interface listing all solicitors and business contacts.
- **Order Creation & Confirmation:** Orders are placed as requisitions and confirmed in-system (instant or short simulated approval delay), adding an extra step of business formality. Once confirmed, they move to delivery scheduling.
- **ETA & Delivery:** Confirmed orders show an estimated arrival time in the shipment list; deliveries occur after this set time.
- **PDA Notification on Arrival:** When an order reaches its delivery time, the player receives a PDA alert indicating it is ready to be received.
- **Receiving Step (Minimal Formality):** After receiving the PDA alert, the player performs a quick "Receive Shipment" action in the interface to acknowledge delivery and transfer items into storage inventory — no physical hauling required.
- **Stock Room Token Update:** Visual back stock tokens update instantly once items are received.
- **Planned Purchasing:** Order ahead based on Docking Registry info (e.g., stocking mining gear before a mining vessel arrives).
- **Shipment Tracking:** Active orders display a clear status (e.g., Ordered, Approved - Pending Delivery, In Transit, Arrived - Awaiting Receipt) for easy planning.

Customer Purchases

The point where inventory moves from display to a customer and generates revenue — and where customer satisfaction is determined.

- Purchases reduce the display's inventory count.
- Storage inventory is unaffected until the player restocks the display (manually or via automation).
- Customer satisfaction is influenced by:
 - Stock availability of desired items (automation can fail to restock if storage is empty).
 - Ease of movement (no excessive pathing blockages).
 - Time spent queued at displays.
- After leaving, a portion of customers posts a review to the Intranet's **Customer Reviews** board.
 - Reviews directly affect **shop reputation**, which in turn feeds into the broader progression/state system.
- Low stock, blocked paths, or long waits often result in negative reviews; efficient service boosts ratings.

Shop Terminal

The shop's fixed workstation sits behind your counter, directly connected to the station's public and commercial networks. It serves as the official face of your business — persistent, closely monitored, and fully accessible to station administration. From here, you oversee the day-to-day operations of the shop: tracking arriving ships, stocking for their needs, responding to official requests, and maintaining your public reputation. The terminal's design is strictly structured and entirely transactional, with every action you take recorded as part of the permanent station log.

Docking Registry

Provides a live manifest of ships currently docked or scheduled to arrive. Displays key details to help you anticipate the type of customers and goods they may be seeking.

- Ship Name
- Faction or Operator (if public)
- Advertised Purpose (fuel, research, layover, trade)
- Passenger/Crew Count
- Origin and Destination (or "Classified" if hidden)
- Docking Duration (ETA until departure)
- Key Notes (e.g., carrying survey team, livestock in cargo, crew on shore leave)

Station Bulletin Board

A community and news feed for the station, containing information and opportunities that can affect customer traffic or demand.

- General announcements (maintenance, dock closures, market days)
- Trade offers (requests for specific goods or quantities)
- Events (research symposiums, dock races, faction celebrations)
- Rumors (smuggler sightings, nearby anomalies, political tensions)

Shipment Management

Tracks the status of your ordered stock and special deliveries, helping you plan your store's displays and respond to supply issues.

- Incoming shipments (ETA, source, quantity)
- Backordered or missing items
- Special rare-item shipments linked to Patron requests
- Rush order option for faster delivery at extra cost

Secure Comms

A channel for official communication with key characters who cannot visit in person. Mostly used for business matters and station-recorded correspondence.

- Receive formal messages from Patrons or Locals about orders or product needs
- Story updates or event invitations that are part of station records
- Product requests sent remotely
- Optional reply function for professional responses

Customer Reviews

A station-maintained record of customer feedback **specific to your shop**. These reviews form part of your ongoing business profile and are viewable only through your own business tools — they are not part of a wider public directory of other shops.

- **Star Ratings & Comments:** After visiting, customers may leave a rating and short comment. These entries are tied directly to your business record.
- **Positive Impact:** Higher ratings improve your reputation, draw increased traffic, and can influence which ships or customer types visit.
- **Negative Impact:** Lower ratings reduce trust, discourage certain visitors, and may lower daily foot traffic.
- **Persistent Record:** All past reviews remain visible in your log, creating an ongoing track record of performance.
- **Driver for Engagement:** Encourages keeping displays stocked, arranging good flow, and maintaining a positive customer experience to influence future feedback.

Personal PDA

A pocket-sized personal device connected to the wider station network but insulated from the shop's official systems. It's the private half of your life — unmonitored, informal, and shaped by curiosity rather than business need. Sideband stores your own notes, personal conversations, rumors, and details that never make it into the station's official logs. If the Station Intranet is your desk at work, Sideband is the well-worn notebook you carry everywhere — messy, human, and yours alone.

Story Ledger

Keeps a record of ongoing stories, gossip, and personal observations, separate from the official station record. Entries show what you've heard, not confirmed facts.

- Tracks Patron and Local arcs in chronological order by entry date
- Records conflicting versions of events without resolving them
- Keeps unfinished or abandoned threads visible for reference later

Private Messages

An off-the-record communication channel for friends, trusted customers, and contacts. These are the things people won't send through official Secure Comms.

- Casual updates or personal greetings from regulars
- Requests for discreet favors or hard-to-find items
- "You didn't hear this from me" tips and warnings