Outdoor kiosks provide new revenue stream for businesses

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OUTDOOR KIOSKS PROVIDE NEW REVENUE STREAM FOR BUSINESSES

The coronavirus pandemic further demonstrated the versatility of kiosks. With businesses forcibly distanced from their customers, the interactive devices gravitated from indoors to outdoors, to meet patrons where they were and provide adequate access.

Though the pandemic is subsiding, restrictions are loosening and the world is gradually returning to a state of normalcy, many of those kiosks that had been positioned outdoors are staying put. And more are likely to join them.

The market for outdoor kiosks is expected to grow at a higher annual rate than indoor kiosks through 2025, according to research. Expansion comes as the self-service technology market is booming. A recent study by Grand View Research Inc. shows that the industry is expected to reach a value of $39.07 billion by 2022, with kiosks – a solution that has become more intuitive and user-friendly – representing some 21 percent of the market.

Positioning kiosks outside expands their usefulness, providing another source of revenue generation for businesses, many of which have recognized the potential value of the solution.

"Kiosks have permeated everyday life but continue to carve new niches," said Brittany Collazo, digital marketing specialist for Advantech, a leader in innovative embedded and automation products and solutions. "Their flexibility outside the four walls of a traditional business setting makes their capabilities boundless."

How can they be used?

Outdoor kiosks already have become mainstays within the quick service restaurant industry. They're quickly creating opportunity in other fields.

Campsites are beginning to deploy kiosks to help visitors find vacant spaces and secure those spots for certain periods of time, paying for electric and water hookups and other amenities as needed.

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For parking lots and garages, standalone kiosks cut down on the expense of anchoring scores of individual meters to the ground. Deployers say the ability to reduce expenses and increase revenue by offering more payment options and more rapidly pinpointing violations have made the kiosks considerably lucrative.

Some maintain a log of all parking spots that have been paid for and for how long. Some are even enabled with pay-by-phone capabilities that let customers dial a phone number that connects them to the kiosk so they can add more time to their space from afar.

Theme parks are expansive areas with an extensive collection of rides and large crowds that often create long lines and difficulty navigating the grounds. Kiosks deployed at entrances enable visitors to bypass crowds to purchases tickets. When inside the gates, they also allow patrons to pinpoint where they are relative to attractions and restaurants and to monitor wait times at rides around the park and, during peak periods, obtain tickets to ride at a specific time during the day.

There's little else that frustrates a tired traveler than heading to the car rental counter, only to be greeted by a slow-moving lengthy line. That's why rental agencies are turning to kiosks to provide for speedier check-ins, allowing drivers to access their reservations, choose vehicles and sign insurance and rental agreements.

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Why should they be used?

Decrease congestion

At high-traffic times, kiosks enable customers to order and pay on demand, keeping them from having to congregate with others in front of a bank of registers. At businesses like fast casual eateries, the units allow diners sitting at tables outdoors or who simply don't want to venture inside to place orders through the device, which connects wirelessly to the restaurant's main point-of-sale system and kitchen displays, sending requests directly to cooks.

Improve customer service

Self-ordering devices reduce errors. With restaurants, for instance, orders come printed directly from the machine to the kitchen. Customers don't have to wait for a server, who may be tied up with other tables or duties, and they eliminate the middle person who may incorrectly key in items. With the installation of self-ordering kiosks, managers also have found that they're able to free up labor that can be redirected to other areas of the operation to help fulfill orders more quickly or to assist customers in need.

Increase order capacity

Businesses have deployed multiple kiosks in concert with traditional registers to provide more access points for placing orders and keeping lines from

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swelling at the counter. With the technology, consumers largely control their experience, from placing orders to paying. Self-ordering technology enables customers to see photos of items they wish to purchase and place orders when they're ready. Those who know what they want can quickly key in selections; those who don't can take the time they need.

Cater to safety concerns

Kiosks enabled restaurants to reopen during the pandemic while still facilitating social-distancing mandates designed to slow the spread of the virus. Customers can access outdoor kiosks to place their orders, pay electronically and then retrieve their food without any sort of physical or close contact.

Considerations for implementation

Compared to their indoor counterparts, outdoor kiosks must be able to withstand constant use – and abuse – from consumers and Mother Nature. Durable equipment results in less maintenance, upkeep and fixes.

Deployers not only need to find ways to ensure their kiosks are identifiable – through bright colors, flashy graphics and non-traditional enclosures. They also should position units in such a manner so they're not hampered by other things such as sunrays that can wash out the screen or they can be equipped with anti-glare, anti-moisture, anti-fingerprint or auto-dimming technology to ensure ease of sight.

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Smart IoT-installed sensors trigger functionality and collect real-time data for real-time insights and decision-making. Most common are light sensors for automated applications, proximity sensors for waking or putting into sleep mode a unit when patrons are nearby and temperature sensors that can either determine whether a patron is potentially ill or whether an extreme outdoor environment may affect devices operationally.

Completing a transaction at a kiosk without interacting with a cashier used to be something of a novelty. Now, it's a preferred approach. Additionally, consumers want to limit their exposure to others and from touching dirty or unsanitary units. Voice and facial AI technology are taking the contactless experience even further where business can be conducted based on sound and appearance stored within a database.

Conclusion

Even as the coronavirus pandemic subsides, the likelihood of a return to normalcy for businesses of all types is extremely unlikely. With revenue down, millions of workers laid off and countless businesses closed – many of them permanently – experts anticipate the operational strategy going forward to be driven by innovation.

Technology such as kiosks increasingly had become cornerstones of the new business model prior to the outbreak. Expect digital solutions to play an even larger role in the post-outbreak environment in new ways.

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