

Your Kiosk and Your Customer

By Anne Warner

These days, it seems that no retail outlet can experience success without providing its customers with ever faster and more convenient service.

No longer happy to wait in queues for hours to buy the daily essentials, no longer satisfied with time-consuming personal service, many customers would instead prefer simple, swift transactions, where finding the desired products takes a matter of minutes, and purchasing less time still. Of course, in any size of retail outlet this is not always possible: in a large outlet, products can be extremely difficult to find, and in a smaller outlet fewer employees mean that the queuing time to pay for a purchase is likely to be longer. In both cases, the result is a number of dissatisfied customers whose expectations of a 'quick shop' and efficient service cannot always be met.

Speed, then, is a factor that affects all retailers, from the smallest to the largest, and customer demand has to be met if retailers want to

keep ahead of the game. The solution? Judicious implementation of self-service kiosks and checkouts.

Think it Through

Self-service solutions in retail have obvious benefits, but it is important to consider every aspect of implementation when introducing this form of customer service into a retail outlet. After all, what point is there in introducing self-service kiosks and checkouts if no customers make use of them? There are two glaring concerns that every retailer should take into consideration when introducing kiosk technology to their stores. Firstly, the technology must actually benefit the customers and the profitability of the outlet, and secondly, it must be simple enough to

use that customers are not put off by the presence of over-complicated technology.

We've all had bad experiences with technology, after all. I remember vividly the first time I used a paying-in kiosk at my local bank; I entered my debit card, followed by the cheque I wished to pay in – whereupon my cheque was taken, I was informed that I had that in fact deposited nothing, and my money proceeded to float merrily around somewhere in the atmosphere until the cheque was found and deposited several months later. Needless to say, I was hardly keen to repeat the experience and instead found myself lining up for the cashier for the next few months thereafter.

In stark comparison to this type of incident, we can look at Tesco PLC, who first commenced a trial of self-



These days there is a kiosk application for any location, every use and every taste



Across the Retail Spectrum

service checkouts in their store at Leamington Spa, England. A customer survey carried out in this store showed that self-service checkouts significantly decreased the length of time of a shopping trip, thus massively cutting the time it took for customers to do their weekly shops. Usage of self-service checkouts has increased substantially and continuously, with more than eighteen percent of customers now taking the self-service option; enough for Tesco to introduce the machines in several other stores across the country, along with a multitude of other large chains who have followed suit.

Self-service 'done right', then, can attract customers very easily. For

instance, Tesco's research also shows that once a customer has taken the initial step towards self-service, they are unlikely to return to the more traditional route, suggesting that the greatest stumbling block for introducing kiosk solutions into retail may be one of customer perception.

Every Second Counts

People do not want to spend time and energy working out how to use a complicated piece of equipment – when time is of the essence, the technology needs to be simple enough to ensure that seconds are



Image courtesy of Tesco PLC

Self-Service is all about simplicity



Images courtesy of Kaufhof Warenhaus AG

saved and not built into wasted minutes figuring out complicated sub-menus. A user-friendly and sensibly designed self-service kiosk or checkout can ensure that once a customer tries it out, they will come back to it time and time again. The benefits will far outweigh the initial wariness of the unfamiliar.

A real challenge in increasing the efficiency of a retail outlet is to do so in a way that does not compromise any other aspect of good customer service. This is where the retail sector can truly benefit from the introduction of cleverly implemented self-service technology. Introducing kiosk technology into a retail environment is likely to actually improve customer service on all bases, while offering a far speedier shopping experience. Kiosks provide the logical answer to the problem of improving customer service, while avoiding the rapidly rising costs of taking on more and more employees to meet customer demand. Several larger retail outlets have already cottoned on to the enormous benefits offered by introducing self-service shopping into their branches, but some have undoubtedly gone further than others in this regard. Kaufhof Warenhaus AG, the large German-based department store chain, is one such firm that has truly embraced the concept of self-service retail and has incorporated kiosks into its branches across Germany.

More in Store

At the entrance to each Kaufhof store, customers can find information about up-to-the-minute offers, promotions and new products as well as information about what sorts of service are provided at the branch. An integrated 'Pathfinder' provides quick and simple directions to particular departments of the store, by brightly highlighting the sought-after department on a clearly displayed floor plan. Kaufhof have also introduced kiosks that enable

customers to search for particular stock items. For instance, the book service kiosk offers customers the ability to search through around 450,000 currently available book titles by title, author, ISBN number or publisher. The printout of the detailed title information of any book can also be used as an order form. Should any book not be available, it can be ordered via the kiosk to arrive within 24 hours. Music receives no less attention, with customers able to choose and listen to over 200,000 CDs by using a music service kiosk. Customers can even receive advice on their selection of wine via a dedicated wine recommendations kiosk, where, on scanning the barcode of a particular bottle of wine, the customer receives information on its flavour, optimal serving conditions and more.

The Sky's the Limit

The limitations of self-service solutions in today's retail environments are really only defined by the limitations of the retail manager's imagination. It is now longer feasible to blame customer technophobia when putting off the admittedly considerable expense of a large-scale kiosk rollout, because with a lot of thought and a little creativity, the return on investment will be paying you back for decades to come.

Remember:

Your kiosk is only

as good as

your concept!