

Skin Deep?

Rich Germain spoke to Michael Reuter from Polygon

Michael Reuter,
Managing Director of
Polygon discusses the
importance of visual,
ergonomic and
structural design
when planning a
successful kiosk
strategy.



KIOSK EUROPE: How important would you say ergonomic and aesthetic design is to the overall success of a kiosk project?

For the most part, design is a key factor in the success of any kiosk project. Many kiosks are completely dependent upon attracting potential users and generating sufficient interest for them to stop and investigate further. If they do not succeed in doing this, even the best software will have no effect whatsoever and the best hardware will remain unused! An appropriate design is crucial to attracting users. Solutions can differ greatly, depending on the target group. For example, when developing the toll-station terminals for Höft & Wessel, we deliberately opted for a design that is reminiscent of the bonnets of classic cars in order to appeal directly to truckers. It doesn't always have to be 'Bang & Olufsen'.

Ergonomic design is a key factor not only for visitors to the kiosk but also for maintenance and service personnel, since an ergonomic design can lead to huge time and cost savings. We attach great importance

to the easy accessibility of all hardware components.

KIOSK EUROPE: Based on your experience, what would you say are the biggest potential stumbling blocks in kiosk design?

Generally speaking, there is a danger of underestimating the complexity of kiosk systems. This happens a lot and it's often down to the fact that kiosks are equated with PCs that are familiar to us from the workplace. However, kiosks operate under much tougher conditions than a PC! What's more, the hardware structure is generally much more complex and users' tolerance thresholds to functional defects are much lower.

At Polygon, the development of a new kiosk follows a polished procedure consisting of several phases, one of which is the manufacture of a functioning prototype. The omission of development phases, for example, due to cost or as a result of the above-mentioned failure to accurately assess complexity, is a dangerous stumbling block. Occasionally, customers consult us about kiosks that are 'almost finished' but that cannot be completed as a result of mistakes made during development. They are always very disappointed when we tell them that we will have to go back to the phase that was either omitted or not developed sufficiently. At the end of the day, the costs are much higher than if the project had been planned meticulously right from the start.

KIOSK EUROPE: Terminals can be fabricated from an increasingly wide range of different materials. How do you choose the right materials, and what are the key factors behind those decisions?

Not only the materials but also the manufacturing technology is a key consideration for us. A certain material might be selected for technical reasons, for example, fire-prevention regulations apply to a metal casing. Depending on the number of units and design requirements, we then decide which technology will be used to manufacture the metal casing. For example, folded sheet metal, embossed sheet metal, extruded sections or via one of many casting methods.

Weight, cost or design considerations can advocate the use of plastics, a variety of which are suitable for kiosk systems and which, in turn, can be processed via a variety of different methods, ranging from small to large-batch production. We also use wood materials or glass.

The choice of the right materials/manufacturing method is based on a detailed knowledge of all methods on the one hand and on an assessment of all the key data of the kiosk project on the other hand. After systematically evaluating all of these factors, we are able to establish the most appropriate method. We are able to approach this topic so openly because, unlike other manufacturers, we are not bound to a specific material or manufacturing method and have a very strong in-house development department.

KIOSK EUROPE: How would you decide which clients would be better off with an adaptation of a standard design and which need a completely customised solution?

Some customers want an exclusive design in order to highlight their innovative company philosophy. In this case, the only option is a completely new design, at least as far as the exterior is concerned. However, at the other end of the spectrum, there are customers who only require a small number of kiosks, which means that only a standard kiosk makes economic sense.



**Customized
standard terminals**


As the majority of our customers are somewhere between these two extremes, we have to consider which of the two options makes the most sense. However, if more than about 200 kiosks are required, a specially developed solution can cost the same, or even be less expensive, than a modified standard kiosk, including development costs. This is because the development work can be geared towards a particular purpose and only those features that are absolutely necessary have to be integrated.

KIOSK EUROPE: When you're building a customised solution from scratch, how do you ensure that development costs are kept under control?

We offer the customer strict design to cost. At the start of each development, we calculate all the necessary phases. An overall budget for development and unit costs for a defined number of units forms the ideal basis for this. Depending

on requirements, it is possible to determine the ideal proportion between the so-called one-off costs and unit costs. This answers the question as to how we can use resources as efficiently as possible to achieve maximum effect.

We always create a detailed project plan that includes all the various phases up to the manufacture of the serial product, including dates for meetings and releases. It is calculated financially and displayed in a schedule. Often, not only costs but also time allowances are critical factors that can, in turn, have an effect on the development process. We are responsible for observing this schedule and cost budget, provided that the customer fulfils his/her obligations. This gives the customer great planning reliability.

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**Polygon's toll-station terminal
for Höft&Wessel**

