

Four Strategies for Kiosk Application Design

A successful kiosk design must be easy and pleasant for the customer to use. Learn common mistakes deployers make in kiosk application design and how to avoid them.

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The moment a person spots a kiosk in a store, the first thing to catch their eye is the kiosk enclosure. That first impression relies strictly on aesthetics, something kiosk designers have been providing to great effect.

A customer's final impression, however, relies on the success of a kiosk's application design, or the usability of that kiosk's software. That is what determines whether or not a user returns to that kiosk, says Francie Mendelsohn, president of Summit Research Associates, a kiosk consulting firm.

"If the software isn't easy to use, I don't care how gorgeous a kiosk is, (the kiosk) will ultimately prove to be a failure," she said.

"Olea prides itself on providing the most aesthetically pleasing kiosks available and we work very hard to drive a customer's brand forward through the kiosk design," said Frank Olea, vice president of kiosk design firm Olea Inc. "However, if the user experience isn't up to par, then the whole program is in jeopardy. The kiosk, unlike an employee, cannot apologize for giving a

poor customer-service experience."

From simply copying content from their Web sites to failing to conduct usability tests, kiosk deployers often make mistakes when designing their user interfaces.

"The same things that caused problems years ago still cause problems today," Mendelsohn said.

Here are four common mistakes deployers make and strategies to avoid them.

Too complicated

Sometimes kiosks can be overwhelming, particularly for first-time users. Therefore,

Easy-to-use characteristics

From the beginning, an easy-to-use kiosk interface should have the following characteristics:

- Easy-to-read text
- Buttons large enough to see easily
- A simple and straightforward process.

it's important to make the kiosk application simple and easy to use.

Companies often will involve users late in the kiosk development process, Mendelsohn says. Usually, the designer will think they've created a terrific application, and



It's important that each screen of an application be consistent, reinforcing the brand image.

then be surprised that usage of the kiosk is low. User feedback in the testing period can help ensure this doesn't happen.

Mendelsohn says that kiosks from redbox, a dvd-rental kiosk company, used to have a screen that said "Please enter the zip code associated with this credit card." However, she says, the screen failed to tell users what to do after they entered their five-digit code. Many of the users assumed that the screen would automatically advance.

"Some people take the on-screen instructions literally and do no more," she said.

Once redbox became aware of the potential confusion with that screen, they changed the design to make sure users pressed "enter" to continue the transaction.

Lack of consistency

Some application designers seemingly believe that each screen of an application should be a separate work of art. From one step to the next, the application will change colors, font sizes and other key characteristics.

Bad move, Mendelsohn says.

"Don't completely change mid-stream what you want the user to do," she said.

While there is no magic place on the screen where something like a button should be placed, it's important to never change where that button is placed during a user transaction with the kiosk. Also, it's important to keep colors the same as the screen changes.

Bob Ventresca, vice president of marketing for kiosk and digital signage provider Net-key Inc., also says it's important to make the buttons consistently large.

“The larger the button, the more impactful the image that really helps somebody understand that this is what you need to do to move on to the next step,” he said.

Lack of common sense with sound

Kiosk sound can be a touchy subject for some, Mendelsohn says, particularly for employees who have to bear the brunt of the noise during a long work day.

“I’ve seen people who will pull the plug on the kiosk because they can’t stand the consistent noise it makes throughout the day,” she said.

In some cases, such as in a big retail store like a Wal-Mart or a Best Buy, Mendelsohn says, a little extra noise isn’t going to make a big difference. But if the environment is smaller, or if the kiosk is on an endless loop, then sound can be an issue.

Sound is helpful when it comes in small doses, Mendelsohn says. A little “ding” here and there increases a kiosk’s usability.

Sound can be advantageous in an application like a photo kiosk. Users sometimes need to be walked through the process of selecting, resizing and producing photos, and sound can help with that. However, the sound only appears when a customer is using the kiosk, so the sound is not heard continuously throughout the day.

“From a user interface standpoint, having



Sound on a kiosk can be helpful, but too much or too consistent a noise can annoy employees and customers.

the ability to put things like clicks or beeps or some other type of mechanism to validate that, yes, you’ve touched that button and it’s going to move on to the next activity can be very helpful,” Ventresca says.

Using an existing Web site as a user interface

Some companies are tempted to jumpstart a kiosk project by taking their existing Web site and using that as their kiosk user interface. The problem with this scenario, however, is that a Web site and a kiosk are very different.

“Time and time again, we have learned and our customers have learned through experience that that is not the way to do business,” Ventresca says. “That’s not to say that you don’t leverage your Web site and leverage the content and information that is on your Web site.”

Ventresca says a Web site is designed for someone who has time to browse for the information they need. With a self-service kiosk in a retail environment, kiosk users are looking for a focused interaction where they can find a product or information very quickly.

“With the advent of things like Web services, you can still use all of the assets you’ve developed for your Web site — it just needs to be displayed in a different way, one that’s most appropriate for an interactive, self-service environment,” Ventresca said.

A Web site is designed for someone who has time to browse, but kiosk users are looking for a focused interaction where they can find a product or information very quickly.

There are other mistakes that can be made and other ideas to incorporate that would make a kiosk interface more successful. One such idea is Haptic feedback, technology that enables touchscreens to give off slight vibrations, simulating the effect of pushing a button.

Mendelsohn says this type of technology also would help a kiosk become more usable, though it has not caught on in the kiosk market yet.

While new technology is exciting, keys to a successful kiosk application include a simple, consistent design that uses appropriate sound and does not port a Web site over to the kiosk without some appropriate modifications.

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