

Keeping in Touch

y Vicki Hodder

CHICAGO-AREA BAR AND restaurant owner Frank Elliott sees the adage “time is money” at work every day. The faster his bartenders and servers ring up drinks and food, the more he sells. It’s as simple as that.

So Elliott uses three Elo TouchSystems touch-screen kiosks in Bonsai Bar & Lounge, a new venture slated for Chicago’s north side. The all-in-one Elo B-series kiosks stationed behind the bar let employees ring up drinks and food quickly and efficiently while offering a host of other services. The Elo units also clock employees in and out, act as cash registers, generate sales reports and ring up gift cards.

The 15-inch screens on the devices are large enough to easily accomplish all these tasks — an advantage Elliott appreciates. When he first took over his flagship operation, Oak Park’s upscale Velvet Rope Ultra Lounge, he recalls working with 10-inch

screens that displayed multiple pages of food and drink menus in hard-to-read fonts.

Now, he says, “I can have the majority of the menu on one screen, and not have multiple screens. You can get the order in much faster.”

Touching Up Kiosks

Elliott’s selection of the Elo for Bonsai Bar reflects more than savvy lounge service. It represents a rise in the popularity of touch-screen kiosks in all types of businesses. Fueled by wireless communications and the prevalence of mobile touch-screen technology on smartphones and tablet computers, kiosks have taken off in the past few years.

Touch screens make kiosks faster and easier to use, says Leslie Hand, IDC’s research director for retail insights. And while that’s been true for a while, the mobile communications boom of the past several years has made typing on a screen

TODD WINTERS

Touch-screen kiosks help Frank Elliott and the staff at Bonsai Bar & Lounge in Chicago ring up customers faster.

instead of a keypad more familiar to users.

"Because we're in the iPad era, almost everyone is comfortable with a touch screen," says Steve Duplessie, founder and senior analyst at the Enterprise Strategy Group. "They're just showing up everywhere and anywhere."

Chris Gilder, CEO of Meridian Zero Degrees, a North Carolina-based kiosk and self-service device manufacturer, says public acceptance of touch-screen kiosks has expanded as consumers become increasingly connected. For example, projected capacitive touch technology — a grid system etched into a sheet of glass that tracks touches by detecting changes in the device's electrostatic field — lets kiosks expand on smartphone capabilities such as multitouch sensing. Kiosk users can now swipe or pinch and zoom, just as they do on their phones, and that increases their comfort level, Gilder explains.

Building Relationships

The growing familiarity with touch-screen technology means kiosks may show up where you least expect them. At the Pacific EyeClinic in Beaverton, Ore., one of six clinics run by the Pacific University College of Optometry, a kiosk encourages patient involvement in their vision care.

The Beaverton clinic uses a Planar Systems 22-inch multitouch screen monitor mounted on the wall of its waiting area, lodged between hundreds of eyeglass frames. Its projected capacitive multitouch screen is designed for long life and lots of touches.

Patients use the kiosk to electronically browse through the selection of eyewear while waiting for their appointment, during which time they can check out frame shapes, colors and specialty offerings with the touch of a finger.

This touch-screen window-shopping often prepares patients to tell

TOUCH 'EM ALL

Touch-screen kiosks can be deployed anywhere there's a standard 120-volt circuit. This gives businesses a lot of flexibility in their placement and makes them available for all sorts of creative uses, including:

DRIVE-THRU FOOD ORDERS:

Drive-thru customers can order food and even swipe their credit cards on a 32-inch kiosk screen

at some fast-food operations. Customers then pick up their food at the drive-thru windows.

CAR CONFIGURATIONS:

At some automobile shows and dealerships, customers can build their own cars on a kiosk. They select from myriad options — color, interior, engine performance and entertainment packages, for example — and receive a price for their custom car right at the kiosk.

EMPLOYMENT APPLICATIONS:

Prospective employees can fill out applications on a kiosk at some companies. This takes the guesswork out of deciphering applicant handwriting and streamlines the process in general. Other human resources forms, such as benefits or nondisclosure forms, also can be completed electronically.

COUPONING:

As customers walk into a store, they can scan their member cards at the kiosk and receive a print-out of coupons tailored to past purchases.

GETTING DIRECTIONS:

Visitors can receive information and directions from kiosks, popular with municipality and state welcome centers as well as college campuses and shopping malls.

SOURCE: Meridian Zero Degrees



Touch-screen kiosks at Bonsai Bar & Lounge in Chicago

the clinic precisely what they want once they've seen an optometrist, says Kenneth Eakland, the college's associate dean for clinical programs. Patients become familiar with their various choices and are active in their care from the moment their fingers touch the waiting room screen.

The clinic also has two Planar 19-inch multitouch monitors, which let clinic employees face patients directly instead of turning their shoulders to face the keyboard while completing paperwork and submitting orders. It's a small change, Eakland notes, but it's important.

Altogether, the clinic's touch-screen technology supports the type of patient relationships that build trust and encourage positive outcomes. "The patient's experience is dramatically better, I think," Eakland says.

Embracing the Big Screen

Motorists have given a thumbs up to the initial rollout of new electronic concierge kiosk systems in Connecticut's highway service plazas.

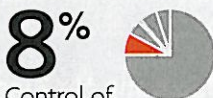
Project Service, operator of the plazas, has installed HP 42-inch widescreen kiosks in four of the state's 23 service plazas, says Wayland Benbow, the organization's marketing director. The HP kiosk uses infrared technology that pairs an array of light-emitting diodes with photo sensors to create a durable touch screen with a high-quality view.

As many as 15,000 visitors used the kiosks during the Milford, Conn., plaza's first month of operation, Benbow says. It's no wonder. The kiosks completely replace the brochure racks that used to clutter the service plazas. Now, visitors and residents navigate the kiosk to find where to stay or eat and what to do during their visit. They can also check the weather or look up local business services and transportation.

Benbow now plans to install the kiosks in all of Connecticut's service plazas. "For all intents and purposes, it's a 5-foot iPad," he says. "Everybody's embracing it." [BT]

Quick Poll

What is the main use for touch-screen technology at your business?



Control of automation systems

5% Self-service

1% Employee training

6% Point-of-sale transactions

5% Public information

75% Do not use

SOURCE: CDW poll of 361 BizTech readers