



Kiosks 21: a new role for information kiosks?

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Abstract

This paper discusses and analyses the latest generation of information kiosks, Kiosks 21, which feature information provision/promotion, interaction, transaction and relationships. In contrast to their task based predecessors, these kiosks focus on customer service delivery to ‘customers in context’. Five case studies of such kiosks located, respectively, in an airport, railway station, car rental base, hotel lobby and shopping mall are analysed to demonstrate the way in which the kiosks are implemented to meet the differing requirements of customers in different contexts. Case studies are analysed in terms of kiosk design and location, user profile, information architecture, interface design, communication and commerce. A range of areas for research and development are proposed. © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.

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1. Introduction

Information kiosks, or public access kiosks, are located in public thoroughfares, shopping malls, airports, railways stations and other locations as a substitute for, or to complement, customer service through a human service agent. In contrast to the other public access information arena, the Web accessed in the home or office, kiosks have received little media, professional or academic attention.

Early kiosks, such as those reviewed by Rowley (1995) were typically uninteresting boxes with relatively simple interfaces, designed specifically to allow customers to conduct a simple transaction, such as placing an order, or locating a specific item of information, such as a recipe or a repayment rate for a mortgage (Rowley & Slack, 2000). The kiosks that are now making an appearance represent a significant change of perspective on the role and nature of kiosks. These 21st century kiosks, described in Fig. 1 as Kiosks 21, support multiple functions including most or all of: information provision, interaction between user and consumer to support the customisation

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	Early Kiosks	Kiosks 21
Physical characteristics	Uninteresting boxes, static displays.	Eye-catching housings, consistent with corporate image. Moving images.
Dialog design	Menu based access to a limited number of screens. Touch screen.	Web/Windows-like interfaces, with data entry dialog boxes, dropdown lists, scroll bars, pointer and hyperlinks. Touch screen supplemented by keyboard.
Location	In-store, in a corner.	In public thoroughfares, entrances and centrally positioned.
Philosophy	Task based.	Customer service based.
Originator	Service provider or retailer.	Infomediary or assembler.
Transaction	Single transaction.	Multiple transactions, communication and information provision.
Connectivity	Stand alone or connected to one proprietary database.	Internet enabled for real-time information provision and communication.

Fig. 1. Comparing early kiosks to Kiosks 21.

of information, transactions (such as ticket purchase), and relationship building through loyalty schemes or other communication opportunities. They fulfil the four functions of kiosks described by Rowley and Slack (2000): information provision/promotion, interaction, transaction and relationships. Most significantly, Kiosks 21 represent a shift from task focus to customer focus in kiosk design. Instead of being designed to allow a customer to complete a single task, or set of closely related tasks, the kiosks offer a range of information and services tailored to the ‘customer in context’. Thus, a kiosk in a shopping centre focuses on shopping-related transactions, and information, whilst a kiosk in a hotel lobby provides travel and tourist information (often with several language options) appropriate to the location of the hotel. This transition to multifunctionality and the creation of a complete support service for the ‘customer in context’ necessitates strategic collaboration in the provision of the information and services that can be accessed through the kiosk. Responsibility for the management of the kiosk in these instances often lies with an infomediary, who specialises in kiosks, rather than individual retailers or store groups.

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