

Kiosk Information Systems

CHALLENGE

Kiosk Information Systems needed a reliable computer platform to form the heart and soul of its kiosks

SOLUTION

Dell™ OptiPlex™ GX280—powered kiosks support multiple applications for many industries; the Dell Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) Industry Solutions Group helps enable the production efforts at Kiosk Information Systems

BENEFIT

Dell computers and services help increase customer satisfaction; the scalable Dell enterprise strategy helps Kiosk Information Systems keep pace with the breakneck speed of the kiosk industry

Think inside the box

Dell hardware and the Dell OEM Industry Solutions Group help Kiosk Information Systems customers help themselves

They help you buy tickets, print photos, check e-mail, and pay bills. And better yet, they never talk back. They are kiosks, and the self-service booths made by Kiosk Information Systems (KIS) help whisk customers through lines at airports, amusement parks, and the Department of Motor Vehicles. In fact, the KIS kiosks do much more, including supporting human resource functions, offering quick ticketing, accelerating order entry, providing store directories and retail advice, facilitating bill payments, serving up directions, and aiding security at checkpoints—all of which have helped propel KIS to the top of the kiosk industry. With a customer roster that includes Pepsi-Cola, McDonald's, FedEx, Wal-Mart, Citibank, Disney, Sony, Borders, Mercedes-Benz, and the United States Postal Service, it is no exaggeration to say that the Louisville, Colorado-based company has become the king of kiosks.

KIS now enjoys a significant market share—despite the fact that the company competes against formidable industry stalwarts IBM and NCR. When asked to describe the success of KIS in an industry replete with behemoth competitors, Tom Weaver, vice president of sales and marketing, says, “Our competitors tend to rely on the Henry Ford philosophy: customers can have anything they want—as long as it is black. By contrast, we design kiosks based upon what our customers really need. We build everything from the inside out. Typically, we meet with customers, talk to them about functionality, and then give them multiple options for how a kiosk might perform and what it might look like.”

KIS looks for a partner

Before Dell came into the picture, KIS tried to cut corners by building its kiosks with white-box or generic third-party computers. “In order to drive costs down, we initially attempted to use white boxes or generic systems either built in-house or provided by other suppliers,” explains Weaver, “We quickly realized that when you start assessing the financial impact of serviceability, replacement parts, and the timely delivery of new systems, the cost of ownership was higher with that strategy.”



As a result, KIS made the strategic decision that when it came time to enter production, the company would look to outsource as many components and as much development as possible. “Today we are more of an integrator than anything else,” says Weaver. “After we assess the customer’s requirements and build a prototype, we outsource everything we can for financial reasons. We have a local company do the metal fabrication. We integrate Dell’s components with the software provided by one of our development shops. Then we add credit-card readers, bill acceptors, printers, monitors, touch screens, or whatever other pre-built systems a customer needs.”

Powered by Dell

As part of the company’s business strategy as an integrator, Dell computers form the heart and soul of the vast majority of kiosks built at KIS today. “We use the Dell OptiPlex GX280 computer in virtually every kiosk we build. Plus, Dell LCD monitors are our standard display,” says Weaver. “The reason we use Dell is because our reputation is at stake. Customers don’t care who is supplying the components as long as they work. With Dell, the components are very reliable.”



Because Dell computers are standards-based and known to integrate well with other components, the product development team at KIS can treat the OptiPlex GX280 as a plug-and-play building block. “We try to fit as much functionality into as small a footprint as possible,” Weaver continues. “Dell computers fit really well with this model—especially with their modular nature. If there is an issue with a PC, our customers can undo four screws, plug in a new Dell computer, and they’re off and running.”

Aside from the modular nature of Dell hardware, Weaver values the consistency of the product line as a way to keep development costs and service requirements low. “In our business, consistency is very important,”

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explains Weaver. “If the smallest little thing changes, it could affect our entire fabrication process. Dell is very good about maintaining the consistency of its products.”

Dell’s OEM team has in-depth knowledge of the unique requirements of the OEM marketplace. Integrating PC hardware into products like kiosks requires dedicated product and software engineering resources, which work to align the OEM customers’ product changes with changes to the integrated component technology. One of the many things that Weaver appreciates about the Dell OEM Industry Solutions Group is its management of product changes, providing enough lead-time to accommodate the needs of its partners. “The last time Dell made a revision to the OptiPlex GX280, we received a heads-up well ahead of time,” says Weaver. “That kind of respect for our needs gave us more than enough time to change our manufacturing process accordingly.”

In addition, KIS is a member of Dell’s OEM Advantage program. Through this program, Dell and KIS sales teams jointly engage customers in need of a customized kiosk solution—providing additional reach to KIS, more visibility to their kiosk solutions, and proliferation of industry standards through Dell’s high-performance technology.

Dell and KIS reap success

Although Weaver is certainly pleased with the Dell hardware, he seems equally impressed with the ability of the Dell scalable enterprise strategy to keep pace with the breakneck demands of the kiosk industry. “We perform huge deployments,” he explains. “We’ve done jobs where we have installed 3,000 units in less than six weeks. Last week, we finished an engagement where we put 1,500 units in place in less than four weeks. Honestly, I don’t know what our ultimate capacity is because we have yet to hit the limit. We are confident that we can produce and install more units than anybody else in the industry, and the ability of Dell to get us the equipment we need when we need it is a key component of our scalability.”

In fact, one needs to look no further than the many happy KIS customers to judge the success of the company’s relationship with Dell. Healthnotes—a premier provider of reliable, easy-to-use health, food, and lifestyle information—has KIS kiosks at supermarkets, health food stores, and pharmacies to help shoppers make healthy and wise wellness decisions. Suffice it to say, Healthnotes is extremely pleased with its Dell-powered KIS kiosks. “Since rolling out our new EasyAnswers Touchscreen Kiosks with KIS, Healthnotes has seen a greater number of our retail customers implement an in-store health and lifestyle information strategy,” explains Jeffrey P. Beyer, chief operating officer for Healthnotes. “Our kiosks are engaging and consumer-friendly and are designed for use by retailers so they are easy to install and maintain.”

Ultimately, nothing at KIS is more important than customer satisfaction, and Dell has become a keystone of the company’s sales strategy. “At the end of the day, our customers don’t care if our partner messed up. When there is a problem, they say, ‘We bought the

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product from you and now it’s not working,’” explains Weaver. “Therefore, we need to make sure that the parts for our kiosks are very reliable. And with the Dell OptiPlex GX280—and the Dell brand name in general—both our company and our customers can rest assured that when they fire up the kiosk, it will work.”

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