



Four ways outdoor kiosks improve drive-thru sales

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Self-serve kiosks, a number of which have mushroomed near service counters at eateries across the country in recent years, are now becoming commonplace in drive-thru's as opportunities for businesses to usher in added efficiencies and to give customers greater control of their ordering experience.

Such a move seems logical. After all, the overwhelming majority of activity at fast food restaurants – some 70%, according to QSR magazine – is done through the drive-thru.

Expansion comes as the self-service technology market is booming. A recent study by Grand View Research Inc. shows that the industry is expected to reach a value of \$39.07 billion by 2022, with kiosks – a solution that has become more intuitive and user-friendly – representing some 21 percent of the market.

As fast food restaurants consider adding units, here are four ways outdoor kiosks can impact drive-thrus.

Improve order capacity

To keep pace with consumer demand for fast food and convenience, restaurants in recent years have transformed physically to squeeze in more cars and cater to them more quickly by adding windows and even multiple drive-thru's.

Self-service kiosks position restaurants to let customers help solve the age-old problems of long lines and wait times. With the technology, customers control the ordering process, from placing orders to making payments.

The units allow customers to see photos of items and place orders quickly. At locations such as Subway, order-takers no longer have to ask nearly half a dozen questions – what type and size of bread, what meats, what cheeses, what toppings – of the customer outside.

Self-ordering devices also reduce errors, with orders going directly from the machine to the kitchen. There's no middle person who may incorrectly key in requests, which has allowed drive-thru kiosks to reverse what has typically been regarded by restaurant owners as a slow, sometimes inaccurate, and costly process.

With the installation of kiosks, managers have also freed up formerly dedicated drive-thru employees and redirected them to other areas of the restaurant to help fulfill orders more quickly or to assist walk-ins.



Decrease congestion

There's nothing more detrimental to a restaurant than for the drive-thru line to snake around the building. It turns off customers, who either pass up the restaurant or, if they're in line for some time, break ranks to head elsewhere.

Long lines generally mean long wait times. And those two serve to sour customers who expect efficiency and speed when it comes to their fast-food orders.

At high-traffic times, drive-thru kiosks enable customers to order and pay on demand. Besides, they're easy to use and navigate, as touchscreens are part of everyday life through cell phones, tablets and other devices.

At some restaurants, activated card readers and bar code scanners have the ability to identify specific customers and display previous order preferences for quick picks and sales.

Provide added durability

Compared to their indoor counterparts, outdoor kiosks don't just have to be tough; they have to be exceptionally tough. Not only must they be built to withstand constant use – and abuse – from consumers, they also must be able to weather whatever Mother Nature dishes out.

A non-functioning or malfunctioning unit can negatively impact a deployer's reputation and the financial bottom line. Durable equipment results in less maintenance, upkeep and fixes.

Experts generally dissuade the use of plastic or wood exteriors as the sun can bleach the materials, dry them out and contribute to premature cracking and breaking. Instead, those in the industry advocate for anodized aluminum, which can be powder coated for additional durability. If an aluminum chassis is not available, powder-coated steel is the next best option for outdoor solutions.

Though seals are used to prevent the intrusion of water, smoke and dust from penetrating kiosks, improper ventilation and poor climate control can pose big problems to units, reducing peak performance and reliability.

To combat temperatures inside an enclosure that can spike with heat radiating from a video screen and the CPU – and from the outdoor air – manufacturers like Meridian equip their outdoor kiosks with air-conditioning units. They've also worked to reduce interior temperatures by incorporating bright screens specifically rated for outdoor use that emit less heat.

Improve customer service

The ordering and delivery experience often can outshine – or overshadow – everything about a restaurant visit, no matter the delectableness of the food. Customers can be an eatery's best – or worst – advertisers. The way in which they're treated and feel about their experience can have a ripple effect through reviews and word-of-mouth.



A key way to ensure quality service and shorter wait times in popular drive-thru's is through the implementation of technology. When customers see navigating a drive-thru as convenient and easy – as opposed to challenging and time-consuming – they keep coming back.

The drive-thru ordering kiosks also enable employees to reallocate the time previously spent taking orders and provides customers more efficient and accurate service, leading to greater ROI.

Self-serve kiosks with touchscreen capability have been installed in the drive-thru's at more than 100 Subways across the country over the last decade, helping drive sales at each of the locations. NEXTEP SYSTEMS married its easy-to-use software with Meridian's flagship Atlas kiosks to create a solution that improves operations and profitability.

Self-serve kiosks are a tool that helps fast food restaurants live up to their name.



About the sponsor:

Meridian works with customers from concept to completion to turn ideas into custom-made kiosks. The company also offers the largest line of standard kiosks in the self-service industry.