Beyond the Blackboard: Kiosks on Campus

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By Richard Slawsky | Contributing writer,
KioskMarketplace.com

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MERIDIAN
CONCEPT TO COMPLETION

Interactive kiosks have long held a place on college campuses.

In fact, the concept of an interactive kiosk had its origin on a college campus, when in the mid-1970s University of Illinois student Murray Lappe came up with the idea of combining a touchscreen and a computer as part of a project for an organization dedicated to pre-med students. The result was the PLATO Hotline, a self-service device where students could look up information about campus organizations, movie schedules and other events happening around town. The device, located in the university's student union building, was so popular that hundreds of people waited in line for as long as six hours to use it.

Although Lappe chose medical school over a career in the newborn kiosk industry, the concept he created now affects nearly every aspect of our lives, from banking to bill payment to photo printing and ticket purchases.

And fittingly, Lappe's idea continues to hold a place on campus. As more and more educational institutions incorporate technology in and out of the classroom, they are finding new ways to leverage kiosk technology to improve university operations as well as the lives of students and faculty.

Up and coming applications

Although the PLATO kiosk was centered on providing information about campus events and the like, it wasn't long before services provided by self-service devices expanded to include things such as wayfinding and building directories.

Today, with technology becoming an increasing part of the college experience, the use of kiosks on campus is growing dramatically. Although it's difficult to quantify the extent to which kiosks are becoming a fixture on campus, nearly every day brings a report of a new deployment.

"There's no denying that students and professors, alike, are more tech-savvy than ever—they're incorporating digital learning into their lectures, presentations, homework, and projects," said Chris Gilder, CEO of Aberdeen, North Carolina-based kiosk provider Meridian.

"However, while many colleges and universities are incorporating technology into the learning environment, many are just beginning to invest in technology outside of the classroom," Gilder said. "While technology is certainly a useful learning tool, universities and colleges can benefit greatly from exploring ways to incorporate it into other aspects of their campus."

Here are some of the latest ways universities are incorporating kiosk technology into campus operations:

Tuition & bill payment

While most colleges and universities offer an online portal for students and parents to pay tuition and fees, those sites are typically only compatible with debit or credit card payments. Tuition and bill payment kiosks, on the other hand, allow students to make payments with cash, check or payment card at their own convenience. The solutions are both secure and user friendly, allowing them to be placed in common areas such as student unions, dining halls and administration buildings, providing students with 24/7 access to their university accounts.

Library services

Long gone are the dusty card catalogues that used to guide college researchers to the scholarly materials they needed. Instead, university libraries are deploying self-service kiosks where students can search the content of the library stacks, arrange to borrow materials from other libraries around the country and even check out books and other media. And for those who need to print out an article from an academic journal, in many cases they can do that via a printing kiosk.

Visitor check-in

Security is becoming an increasing concern on campus, and many institutions are requiring visitors to check in with officials when arriving. It could be prospective students participating in a tour, current students arriving for an academic advising or tutoring appointment or vendors making a delivery to a campus building. Self-service devices allow users to bypass the traditional check-in process at the administration desk, instead interacting with the kiosk to check in, confirm their information and electronically complete any necessary documentation. By moving those mundane tasks to a kiosk, university employees can instead provide more personalized service, answering questions and providing guidance to visitors or students.

ID card printing

Students and on-campus staff use their ID cards for a multitude of daily tasks, from swiping into buildings to buying food in the dining hall and checking out materials or computers from the library. If someone loses their ID card, they'll most likely want to replace it immediately. While most colleges and universities have an office where students and staff can replace their cards during business hours, ID card printing kiosks allow for 24/7 access. Students and staff can simply take their picture, pay for and retrieve their card at the kiosk in a matter of minutes.

Donor recognition

Universities have long depended on donations from wealthy alumni and other successful individuals to help fund the programs they provide, and many campuses have space dedicated to thanking those contributors. An interactive kiosk can provide information in the form of text, audio and video spotlighting the ways donors have helped the university and the impact their contributions have made.

Self-order foodservice kiosks

Many college campuses provide dining services these days in a food court-style environment, with students paying for their meals with points stored in an account accessed with their ID card. Students simply place their order at the kiosk, swipe their ID card and pick up their meals at the counter.

Mental health services

With the cost of a college education always on the rise and competition for admission to programs such as medical or law school becoming increasingly fierce, students today are under a tremendous amount of pressure. According to research conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness. One in four college students have a diagnosable mental illness, and 80 percent of students feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities. To help combat the issue, a number of universities have deployed survey kiosks that screen for mental illnesses and refer students to available treatment resources.

Getting smarter all the time

Education continues to evolve, and technology is one of the main forces driving that evolution. At the same time, colleges and universities face ever-increasing budget pressures while at the same time they work to improve the level of service they offer both students and faculty.

All sorts of businesses are benefiting from the incorporation of kiosk technology in their operations, and educational institutions are no different. The tasks that once required students to spend a good part of their day waiting in line to accomplish can now be taken care of in a few minutes at an interactive kiosk.

And as the capabilities of interactive kiosks expand, it's a sure bet that those institutions will find new and innovative uses for those devices.

Florida International University improves student service with bill pay kiosks

The challenge
Florida International University is committed to high-quality teaching, state-of-the-art research and creative activity, and collaborative engagement with local and global communities. With a student population of 54,000, FIU is the 10th largest public university in the United States. In order to serve its students better, FIU needed a way to make tuition, housing and bill payment more convenient for its diverse student population.

The solution
FIU teamed with Aberdeen, North Carolina-based kiosk provider Meridian to develop a self-service solution to expedite the payment process for students. Meridian leveraged its proprietary transactional software and G6 Plus kiosk unit to create a self-pay kiosk-based service for FIU students. The G6 Plus is a secure, versatile kiosk designed for robust 24-7 unattended operation. Meridian's transactional software is integrated with

university accounting and allows students to look up account balances and make cash and check payments on their tuition, meal plans and housing accounts. The ADA compliant solution includes a check scanning and escrow device, bill acceptor with bunch note feeder, touchscreen navigation, thermal receipt printer and a camera for added security and analytics.

The results
The first self-pay kiosk was installed at FIU in March 2016, with additional kiosks installed in October 2016. During the first year, over 3,000 transactions have been completed resulting in more than $4 million in total transaction value. Of these transactions, 55 percent were cash and 45 percent were check, money order or cashier's checks.

Source: Meridian

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.