

Turnkey solutions steal focus at Self Service Expo



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Turnkey solutions and mobility stole the spotlight at this fall's **Kiosk-Com Self Service Expo** in New York City — a reflection of a maturing and more sophisticated kiosk industry.

"I think you see more companies interested in providing complete turnkey solutions," said Rob Leiponis, president of **Parabit Systems Inc.**, which provides security products and services that enhance electronic-delivery systems. Most of Parabit's customers are financial institutions.

Leiponis' views are not isolated among industry insiders. In fact, during last week's expo, Leiponis' comments were echoed throughout, namely by tried-and-true veterans in the space who now recognize that the industry must create products and services that FIs, retailers, health-care providers, etc., want.

David Drain, executive director of the **Self-Service & Kiosk Association**, says the industry is solidifying.

It's an industry lesson companies like Infonox and KIOSK Information Systems have taken to heart.

Infonox founder and president Safwan Shah says his company's vision, strategy and service structure revolves around the idea of providing customers a holistic offering.

"We connect, access and serve," he said. "We are a one-stop shop for everything but the hardware. But we partner with other companies for that, so we can provide an end-to-end solution for the customer."

Through a partnership signed in April, Infonox and **Elan Financial Services** developed a multifunctional ATM/kiosk called the Pass+ line. Once signed up, FIs, independent sales organizations and retailers can tap into Infonox' Active Payment Platform while processing transactions through Elan. The ATM/kiosk line also comes preloaded with Infonox software.

"We see a huge market opportunity in offering solutions to our client base to help them deliver a variety of kiosk-based financial services," said Janet Estep, president of Elan, shortly after the deal was announced. "With declining ATM-transaction volumes, new delivery methods become necessary for tapping into new revenue and new service offerings from different transaction types and new customer segments."

It all goes back to providing the company client with what it wants, Shah says.

KIOSK Information Systems takes a similar position. Through partnerships with forward thinkers like **Hewlett-Packard** and **Felix Corp.**, KIOSK is working to provide comprehensive products and services. In the KIOSK booth, HP featured some of its products, which cater to public-sector and enterprise accounts. Felix, which is just entering the U.S. market, showed off its Max Box hybrid ATM/kiosk that is now being manufactured in the States by KIOSK for distribution in the U.S. market. The only difference between the company's U.K. and U.S. deployments is the lack of ATM functionality in the first machines released in the States, says Sallie Worthington, product manager for Felix Corp.

KIOSK also announced a new deal with a telecom lifecycle management company called **TeraNova Consulting Group**. Through TeraNova and wireless providers like Sprint, KIOSK is offering bundled services for wireless kiosk deployments.

Making the move to mobile connectivity is something many companies on the show floor highlighted, including **IBM**, which touted its recent deal with lead connectivity partner Sprint. With Sprint, IBM's Anyplace kiosk, which earlier this month was released in revamped form, offers Ethernet, wireless LAN and WAN connectivity. Bruce Rasa, who oversees marketing for IBM's Anyplace kiosk, said the ability to deploy kiosks nearly anywhere is opening new doors of opportunity for retailers of all sizes and styles.

"The mobility angle is enormous," Rasa said. "You can trial something on the kiosk and place the kiosk anywhere in the store and move it around, if you don't like it or the deployment doesn't work. The only thing that connects to the wall is the plug into the outlet for electricity."

The Anyplace is also the first kiosk to be WiMAX compliant, meaning it can offer high-speed connectivity that's wireless. WiMAX, which stands for Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access, is a wireless industry coalition. WiMAX technology enables multimedia applications with wireless connections and carries a range of up to 30 miles.

This season's Self Service Expo marked a number of emerging trends, and firsts. The Oct. 23-24 tradeshow, formerly known simply as KioskCom and owned by JD Events, was the first fall show for JD operating under the Self Service Expo name. It also was the first time the expo had been held in New York, and the first expo to include digital signage as a focused-on technology.

Lawrence Dvorchik, general manager of the expo, says the show marked the expo's official foray into digital signage.

"We decided to include more digital signage this year because our attendees wanted it," he said. "After we surveyed attendees in Las Vegas, they told us they wanted it. So, this is the first time we've had a concerted effort to incorporate digital signage."

Dvorchik said JD Events has already nearly doubled its digital signage numbers for its spring and fall shows, which will respectively be held in Las Vegas and again in New York.

Joel Davis, president of JD Events, also said this year's expo was unique because of the heavy emphasis placed on attendee quality over quantity.

He said about 1,000 pre-qualified attendees were registered for the event. Overall, more than 1,800 professional attendees were counted at the show.

In addition to the attendee list, more than 90 exhibitors were on hand.

And now, a glimpse from the show floor.

Self-service: Kiosk, ATM and digital-signage style

ACI Technology brought several models of its ultra-slim, aluminum industrial panel PCs to Self Service Expo. All of ACI's PCs are fan-less and feature heavy duty touchscreens.

"These PCs are all custom-made for each customer," said Dennis Sward, account executive. Sizes range from 10.4 inches to 15 inches, but Sward said ACI has plans of introducing a 19-inch model next year.

Agilysys showed several point-of-purchase and product locator kiosks. Agilysys generally works with customers in retail and hospitality markets to provide IT solutions. At the show, Kim Harrison of Agilysys announced that the company had been working with Micro Industries' Touch & Go kiosk as well as its MCast digital signage solution.

Alacrinet had its Self Service Kiosk Portal on display, which is designed for the IBM WebSphere Portal. The software is designed for administration of deployed kiosks and can lock down the kiosks operating environment, secure network access and helps integrate kiosk peripherals. Alacrinet also offers nine different types of kiosk enclosures.

Anywwwhere is a provider of hosted Internet café services and was exhibiting near the entrance of the expo hall. Anywwwhere boasted a small footprint service which increases customer traffic and can add significant income. By using a hosted service, deployers don't have to deal with the hassle of managing a traditional Internet café.

Apunix, long-time stalwarts of the kiosk scene, were proudly showing off its on-the-spot membership card printing application, which takes customer applications for any number of programs (loyalty, membership, frequent flier, etc.) and immediately dispenses a customized, magstripe card. The system has recently been deployed by Qatar Airlines, to run its frequent flier/loyalty program. The company also offered hands-on demonstrations of its touchscreen solutions for retail and foodservice.

ArcaTech Systems highlighted its cash-management systems, which now includes remote cash and check capture. Aubrey Meador, vice president of sales and marketing for ArcaTech Systems, said the company is currently piloting remote-capture now. Through a deal with Reiner, a Germany-based scanner company, ArcaTech is distributing Reiner's check scanners, designed for self-service applications, in the United States, as well as a few other markets. The deal took effect Oct. 1. ArcaTech demoed a single-check scanner, the 890/891, but Reiner also manufactures a bundle feeder, the 893, that can accept up to 50 notes at a time.

"This is a good relationship for us, because it ties in with automating financial transactions," Meador said.

Card Scanning Solutions demonstrated its idScan driver's license reader, which scans both sides of a license with a single pass and includes optical character recognition and built-in license verification and 2-D barcode reader. The company also showed its ScanShell.net scanning application, which reads and extracts data from driver's licenses, passports, medical insurance cards, business cards and a number of other document types.

California-based startup **Ceino** demonstrated its StoreHub software package, an assisted selling application that attempts to emulate online suggestive selling techniques in the store. Users looking for a gift touch a few buttons to create a profile of the gift's intended recipient — age, relationship, gender, career, etc. — and are then asked to answer several A/B questions about the person's tastes. Finally, the user is asked how much he wishes to spend — and is then shown products within that price range that the recipient would like. The system can also be used for customers shopping for themselves, offering product recommendations based on personality profile and tastes.

DT Research showed its WebDT content management system on a digital sign at its booth. John Ochoa, director of business development, said that the WebDT system allows users to design content on the screen themselves by creating content in zones and then selecting when and where those zones should be played in the content loop. Customers can use the preloaded templates or design their own.

For Mike Honkomp, director of new market development for **Electronic Systems Protection**, Self Service Expo was one of the many stops on his tour of the country, where he demonstrates power filtration solutions for kiosks and office machines. ESP's power filters are designed to protect internal hardware from damage caused from power spikes and lightning, as well as constant electric noise.

Epson was on hand with its kiosk printers, as well as two standalone kiosks to show them off. Also on display was a mass CD duplication system, which burns discs and prints images on them at the same time.

MediaPort sponsored the Internet access area of the show, but that was not why the company garnered attention. MediaPort allowed attendees to burn their own custom music mixes on its music burning kiosks, which feature a touchscreen and a music library of more than one million songs and 70,000 albums. MediaPort kiosks have already seen heavy traffic in Army bases and Australian Virgin MegaStores.

"We're seeing the most sales coming from music stores because people are already thinking about buying music," said Dave Champlin, vice president of marketing for MediaPort. "For the deployer, they help get rid of excess inventory and don't allow any shrinkage."

MEI's featured product for the show was the Series 2000 4-in-1 bill validator, which Alec Shekhar, Americas marketing manager for MEI, said combines contactless payment technology with the traditional swipe method for accepting credit and debit cards. True to its name, the 4-in-1 also accepts bills and promotional coupons. The bill acceptor was in action at the show as it was featured in MediaPort's music-burning kiosks.

NCR Corp. showed off its FastLane check-out kiosk. Although the kiosk has been in the market for eight years, the FastLane Mini, which is built on the easypoint 42 kiosk, remains the industry's smallest full-function self-checkout kiosk, says Chelsea Redington. In addition to the FastLane, NCR also displayed its easypoint Advantage, its thinnest kiosk. The Advantage in 2008 is expected to come with a 19-inch display option. During the show, NCR used the Advantage to show its prepaid application, which allows retailers to offer card loads and reloads.

Jeremy Laughlin, NCR's solutions specialist for self-service, said the Advantage does not currently dispense cards, but that functionality is something he expects the company to offer in the very near future. The Xpress is NCR's bill-payment kiosk, which, like the FastLane, is built from a base that is the easypoint 42. The Xpress has the ability to dispense cards, Laughlin said.

Neptune Digital, a new entrant to the digital signage space, showed its Linux-based played boxes and software. The company, which is almost a year old, has its official launch in January 2008; it will launch with some high-profile deployments for Danish Railways and Copenhagen's public transport system, and it has also landed the deal to place screens on buses for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Card dispensing is a technology that is being offered on Pay-Ease's Automated Commerce Machines. The ACMs, which accept cash, credit and checks, are hyper financial kiosks that are can offer a range of services, including bill-payment.

Dean Scaros, Pay-Ease's president, said the company is seeing success and interest in its bill-payment offering, especially in the municipality space.

"We're now live with the city of Chicago for a water-payment and parking-ticket deployment," Scaros said. "We now have more than 20 kiosks deployed in the city."

Pay-Ease, which touts itself as being a turnkey deployer, processes the transactions and provides the integrated hardware, is now focusing its attention on growth in offerings that cater to municipalities and ISOs who work with retailers.

Smart Modular Technologies debuted its XceedPC/M1 embedded PC, a fanless board designed for Windows XP, XP Embedded or Linux. The board ships with dual display support, and offers a host of expansion slots. It includes built-in 802.11a/b/g wireless and supports up to 4GB of RAM. The company also demonstrated its line of LCD touchmonitors, available in 15-, 17- and 19-inch configurations.

Smart Power Systems continues to offer products that prevent power surges and regulate voltage so as not to damage kiosks and other computers. Dana Davis, sales manager for Smart Power, demonstrated the advantages of power protection to visitors of his booth. Smart Power manufactures power filters, surge protectors and uninterrupted power supplies designed to protect kiosks and their internal hardware from everyday power spikes and surges that can cause disruption, degradation and eventually destruction.

StacoSwitch showed two of its lines of heavy-duty keyboards. One is a waterproof, rubber covered model. The other is a stainless-steel encased keyboard with an optional metal trackball. Although known in the self-service industry for outdoor and rugged kiosk deployments, Hixon Eldridge, regional sales manager, said that most of StacoSwitch's keyboards are used for police and military applications.

Ultimedia showcased its new Anyware kiosk, the EQ2. The kiosk, which hit the market three months ago, is based on IBM's Anyplace kiosk, says Eric Dumouchel, Ultimedia's chief executive. The company's deal with IBM is a new one, and includes a distribution agreement with Ingram

Electronics for the United States. The Anyware kiosk, through an Avatar named "Lucy," walked visitors to Ultimedia's booth through the company's host of kiosk offerings.

James Bickers, editor of Digital Signage Today, and Bill Yackey, managing editor of Digital Signage Today, also contributed to this article.