

Kiosk turns wine shoppers into experts

A popular tourist attraction improved customer satisfaction and employee training with an innovative wine-information kiosk

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Peace Bridge Duty Free is one of the largest shops of its kind in the world and the largest on the U.S.-Canada border. It is located in Fort Erie, Ontario, just across the border from Buffalo, N.Y., and attracts visitors traveling for business and pleasure alike. Peace Bridge Duty Free is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and offers many items that can be found in a typical department store, such as clothing and jewelry. The shop also offers a full selection of wine, spirits and beer.

“We have a very diverse clientele and a very diverse product selection in the store,” general manager Chuck Loewen said.

The problem

While that diverse selection is, in many ways, a good thing, it poses a challenge for employees, in that it is difficult for them to be experts on every item in the store.

“They know a little bit about everything, but not everything about everything,” Loewen said, regarding the wine and spirits section, “We have varying levels of expertise, from novice to expert.”

The mostly travel-weary customers are not all wine experts either, and they typically don’t feel up to picking their brains for any knowledge they might have possessed once upon a time. They want to find something good and find it quickly.



Peace Bridge Duty Free, located in a high-traffic tourist destination, deployed the Curiosk wine-information kiosk in September 2008. Since then, the device has seen more than 2000 interactions.

The solution

To help address the problem, Loewen installed a wine kiosk known as “the Curiosk” and created by Curiosk Marketing Solutions in September 2008 in a high-traffic area of the store’s wine department. The kiosk is small, only occupying four square feet of space. It is simple and easy to use and allows customers or employees to scan a bottle of wine. Once the bottle is scanned, the customer obtains access to a wide array of practical information, including storage instructions, food pairings, shelf life and taste characteristics (dry, fruity, etc.). The accuracy of the information is never in question, as it is provided directly by the wine’s producers or distributors. And it’s not just about the nuts and bolts — if the wine has a particular rating, the Curiosk can display that information as well.

“When I was first made aware of it, I knew that this was exactly what we needed for our business,” Loewen said.

An extra bonus is that the Curiosk doesn’t stop at providing information. If a bottle of wine is being bought as a gift, the customer can even print out a card that fits around the neck of the bottle. The card can feature personalized greetings and includes all of the practical information the customer received from the original scan.

The results

While the Curiosk has only been deployed at Peace Bridge Duty Free for a short time, customer and employee reactions have been overwhelmingly positive.

“Both the customers and the employees have reacted in an absolutely positive way,” Loewen said. “They’ve been absolutely overwhelmed with the type of information, the extent of the information and how easy it is to use. There have been no negatives. It has added to the complete shopping experience.”



The decision makers at Peace Bridge Duty Free were so impressed with the Curiosk that they added a second kiosk in another area of the shop in January 2009.

And it's not just about the reactions. The numbers also are impressive.

Since its deployment at Peace Bridge Duty Free in September 2008, the Curiosk has received more than 2000 interactions. To help facilitate the already booming usage, Loewen said he has placed signs throughout the store advertising the kiosk and encouraging customers to use it. Employees also have been instructed to encourage its usage. On a few select days during the Christmas shopping season, Curiosk even sent representatives to Peace Bridge to show customers the ins and outs of using the device.

The Curiosk also has been an invaluable training tool for the shop. When a new employee comes on board, he is able to spend time at the kiosk and learn about the many different varieties of wine and spirits sold at the store. Employees don't have to spend years studying wine to be knowledgeable; they can simply spend some time with the Curiosk and familiarize themselves with the information.

"It's a great way of conveying product knowledge," Loewen said.

The Curiosk also is helpful in taking pressure off of the employees. Before its installation, an employee who was unsure of how to answer a customer's question had to search for someone who knew the answer, all while the customer waited. Now, if an employee is asked a difficult question, all he has to do is scan the bottle at the Curiosk.

The shop's first Curiosk was such a success that Loewen decided to install a second one to assist customers in the scotch and liquor department. Peace Bridge offers a wide variety of single malt scotches and other liquors, and just as customers and employees don't always know everything about wine varieties, they often are also at a loss as to what differentiates one type of scotch from another.

The second kiosk, installed in January 2009, will help bridge that knowledge gap.

Loewen is so pleased with the overall results that he would recommend it to any business that sells alcoholic beverages.

"I don't know why anyone wouldn't want it," he said. "It's that good of a product."

About the sponsor: *Curiosk Marketing Solutions Inc. is redefining the way people shop for, buy, give, receive and enjoy wine and spirits. Installing a Curiosk touchscreen kiosk lets wine and liquor retailers enhance customer service, increase basket size, achieve store differentiation, provide a value-added product and turn browsers into buyers.*