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# Kiosk Design 101

by: lief larson

Last month I had the chance to experience something that is becoming more and more commonplace in the world of kiosks. That is, I had Amanda Bolah and sister Allison visit the Minneapolis office of KIOSK Magazine all the way from Washington D.C. researching the process of designing an interactive kiosk.

These two entrepreneurs founded their minority-owned company EqualEye about a year and a half ago intent on becoming a large Web development firm. However, they soon discovered that more and more of their professional interests were pulling them towards new media and interactivity. Living in a city like D.C., they also conveyed their belief that opportunities abound for them since kiosks could help provide better government services.

Stepping away from the meeting later that day, it really hit me just how entrepreneurial the interactive kiosk industry is. It all begins with a person who recognizes an opportunity to serve someone better by employing interactivity and technology. It also took me by surprise the fact that there is no definitive starting point to get a kiosk conceptualization into an actual product.

To help solve the "where do I begin?" problem, I've asked a very entrepreneurial company to answer the questions many entrepreneurs and designers face when approaching a kiosk project for the first time. Irvine, CA.-based CeroView was founded employing basic design and manufacturing principals and has flourished as a turnkey kiosk solution provider. Since the company has overcome many of the tribulations of kiosk design by experience, they are an excellent authority. For this article, I sat down with CeroView's President, Derek Fretheim and asked him first hand, questions often pondered by "first timers" to the industry.

## Do people really use these things (kiosks)?

If an application and kiosk is designed properly, absolutely! I see more and more acceptance by the public in using kiosks. Much of the fear factor has been taken away since there is such a parallel to kiosks, web sites and ATM's. Self-service was introduced quite some time ago, kiosks are an element to our self-service society. People grow impatient or are so accustomed to immediate gratification; kiosks provide that instant interaction people want. I believe we are only at the beginning.

## What are the typical costs of a kiosk program?

That's a loaded question. Much depends on the function and number of kiosks. Typical elements that determine costs are the enclosure with supporting peripherals; kiosk operating system; application; immediate and long-term support. There is so much in between that I think it is better for someone starting out to breakdown the investment using a well thought out business plan. Cost tolerance should be based on your business model.

## How do I determine what software will be best for my kiosk?

This is often times an under-researched question. The best way to answer this is by asking yourself questions. What do I want my kiosk application to do? What type of support do I need? What source material will I use? Will the software support the peripherals I plan to use? How does the software support my immediate and long-term objectives?

And then you have to ask similar questions about the software company. How long have they been in business?

How many times a year do they have version releases? How many staff do they employ? How many kiosks are in the field using their product? The best advice I have is to create a list of what you want and find the company that offers the best product suited to YOUR needs. Do your homework and check references.

### **What is the best way to determine if my kiosk needs a firm that specializes in a total kiosk solution?**

This is more of a personality question. How comfortable are you in having to deal with multiple companies or personnel? Think of it as building your home; do you want to deal with a General Contractor or the individual subcontractors? There are many pros and cons to each; too many to list.

### **What hardware and peripherals absolutely need to be on my kiosk?**

Again, this is based on end-application and functionality. Don't fall into the trap of cutting corners with your peripherals. Ask your provider what peripherals go inside the kiosk(s). Ask this question to yourself, "what happens to my kiosk's credibility if it is not working?" Consider how many times you would frequent an ATM if it didn't work. We use only proven, market-tested peripherals with the objective of removing the headache factor. The headache factor to me is having a kiosk you need to baby sit. Using a plastic keyboard is a good example of skimping, while their initial cost is low, when it breaks it's a pain and costly to fix. I feel strongly in only purchasing quality items. If a firm is serious about its kiosk program, then they shouldn't mind paying for quality.

### **Where is the best place to put my kiosk?**

After you figure out the enclosure and application side; location is the next important element. Use common sense. Foot traffic increases visibility, visibility increases usage. Though, don't rely on visibility and location alone. Create a marketing plan to further expose users to the kiosk functions. I have seen kiosk applications in the past where the marketing end has not been thought out. Placing a kiosk in a high pedestrian traffic area does not guarantee usage. Don't underestimate the need to have a sophisticated marketing plan. A well thought through application will help to keep visitor traffic high.

### **Does the appearance of the kiosk really matter that much?**

YES. This cannot be under estimated. Curb appeal is part of the user experience. It's your first impression that draws them to using the system. A well-designed attractive kiosk combined with an eye-popping application is a winning combination.

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