



In-store Web sites: The pitfalls

Offering customers in-store access to your Web site may be more complicated than it seems.

On the surface it seems like a no-brainer: Take an existing Web site, run it on off-the-shelf hardware and you have a cheap in-store kiosk solution. The benefits would appear to be:

- Customer acceptance (they already use our Web site)
- Cheap hardware
- No development costs
- Easy installation and management

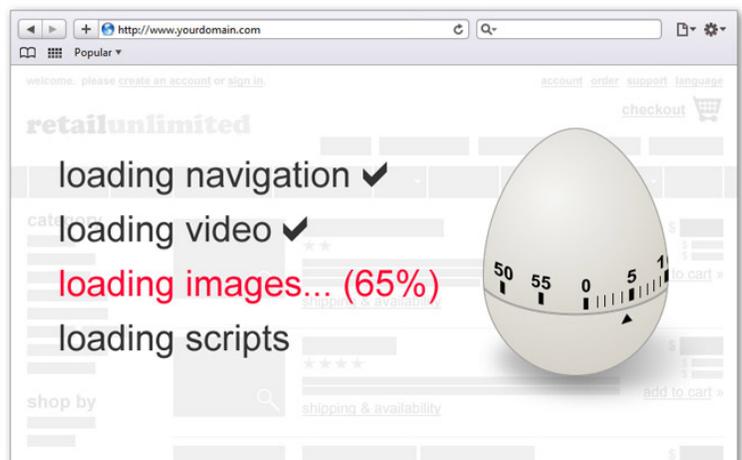
Unfortunately, those benefits are often illusory. Here's why:

Customer Acceptance

The Web experience is very different than the in-store experience. Familiarity with the Web site does not make a customer comfortable with an in-store system. Reasons include:

- Customers may tolerate Internet delays at work or home, but in a retail environment, customers will quickly lose interest if delays are more than a few seconds.

- In a work or home environment, users typically access a Web site over a long period of time without distraction. A kiosk, on the other hand, is accessed briefly in a highly distracting environment.
- Users typically view a Web site while seated, using a mouse and keyboard. A kiosk, in contrast, is accessed standing up using a touchscreen.
- A Web site generally requires many page transitions before a task is com-



In a store environment, customers will quickly lose interest if delays are more than a few seconds.

plete, while the in-store environment is an instant-gratification environment. Typically, results must be achieved in three page transitions or less.

- A Web site provides many different functions and is often complex. In-store, only a small subset of functionality is needed.
- “Hover over” is not available on a touchscreen. This means that the only way to determine the result of pressing a button is to press it. This can quickly lead to frustration.

Hardware

PC Based: The cheapest hardware is often a small form-factor PC with an LCD screen. This sits on a table (or in a purpose-built fixture) and has a mouse and keyboard. The hardware can be purchased for less than \$1,000. Although this is a low-cost solution, there are many disadvantages:

- It looks like a computer. Customers may associate this with a slow, complex work environment, not a fun retail environment.
- The peripherals — mouse, keyboard, scanner, printer — are not integrated. This can look amateurish.
- The equipment can be easily damaged, especially the mouse and keyboard. Liquids tend to be a particular hazard.
- Typically, these solutions use consumer grade components that offer a limited life span.
- Consumers need to sit down to interact with the keyboard and mouse.



Purpose-built units usually are expensive and can require a considerable amount of floor space.

This takes a significant amount of floor space, making it hard to justify a prime location.

- Branding is difficult.

Purpose-built: This typically is a floor-standing unit and has a base price of \$2,000 - \$3,000. Disadvantages include:

- The price rapidly increases as the necessary options are added.
- The floor space normally required for such units may be difficult to justify.
- The large case size can be very intimidating to customers.
- Expensive to service.



With a custom Web site, navigation must be restricted to only allow a subset of the pages available on the Internet site.

No Development

The changes necessary to use an existing Web site would seem to be limited to locking it down to prevent access to the rest of the Internet. In reality, it often can be cheaper to develop a custom site just for in-store use. Custom features include:

- Browsing mechanisms to support a touchscreen.
- Buttons and links sized to support a touch screen.
- A home screen designed for a retail environment.
- Customer data must be explicitly deleted before the next customer uses the kiosk (no cookies).
- “Hover over” functionality must be removed. This can require significant page redesign.

- On-kiosk site hosting to eliminate delays in page changes.
- Locking down of the desktop.
- Navigation must be restricted to allow only a subset of the pages available on the Internet site.

Installation and Management

- Typically, customers do not report issues with in-store kiosks. Kiosks must be monitored and technicians dispatched when necessary.
- Kiosk repair can be expensive. It is usually necessary to repair the kiosk on-site as it cannot be easily swapped out.
- Kiosks typically are connected to the Internet, which makes them susceptible to the normal Internet viruses.

Software must be kept up to date, and anti-virus software must be deployed and maintained.

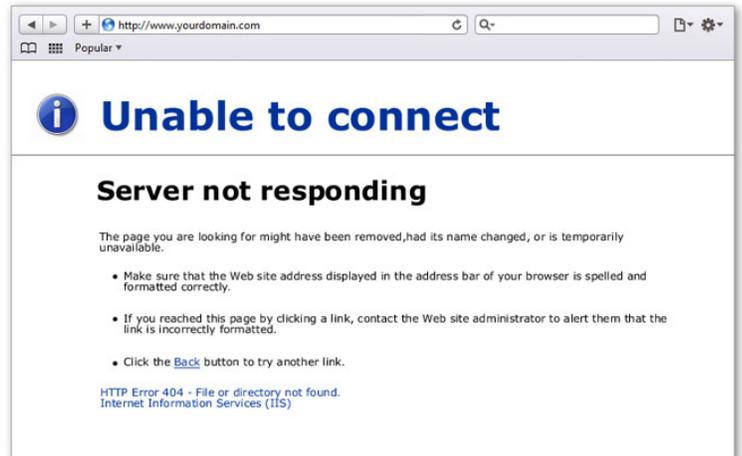
- In-store hosted Web sites must be synchronized with a centralized host.
- Customer usage data must be collected.
- Internet connectivity must be maintained.

Customer experience is key. The best customer experience is gained when the solution is tailored for the environment, rather than using a hybrid.

Hardware is fundamental to the solution. Treating it as other than an integral part of the solution can lead to problems.

Projects often start down the Web site-in-the-store path, but after many weeks of work, a customized solution is adopted.

Lastly, a piecemeal solution can have many hidden costs and be expensive to deploy, maintain and upgrade.



Typically, customers do not report issues with in-store kiosks. Kiosks must be monitored and technicians dispatched when necessary.

About the sponsor: *Founded in 1999 and based in Vista, Calif., RedDotNet develops, manufactures and manages end-to-end solutions for the retail environment. The company offers interactive, multi-media solutions, including innovative kiosk design, to help retailers and suppliers connect with customers. To learn more, visit www.reddotnet.com.*