

Adding Customer-Facing Touchpoints with Kiosks

An innovative restaurant concept incorporates kiosks into its efforts to connect with customers.

By Emily Wheeler
Contributing editor,
KioskMarketplace.com



The players

NEXTEP SYSTEMS, based in Troy, Mich., is a provider of self-service solutions for restaurants, casinos, airports, sporting venues, grocery stores and other high-volume food-service and entertainment venues. NEXTEP's core business revolves around self-service kiosks, online and smartphone ordering and digital menu boards.

Boloco is a Boston-based group of 18 restaurants located throughout New England, serving traditional and globally inspired burritos, bowls, salads, smoothies and shakes. Every order is made to the specific wishes of each guest and includes the most delicious culinary traditions from all over the world. Boloco was the first chain of restaurants in the United States to be named 2 Star Certified Green Restaurants by the Green Restaurant Association. The most popular of its latest initiatives in sustainability are naturally raised meats, potato starch utensils and recyclable bowls.

The challenge

Boloco is a fast-growing chain of restaurants in New England, with locations opening in the Washington, D.C. area

in 2012. The company is committed to providing an exceptional experience with high-quality food to its customers. Part of Boloco's commitment to excellence involves offering a variety of options to its guests, whether through customizable meals or a variety of channels on which to connect with the company.

"Kiosks were another way for us to increase speed of service, while still providing unparalleled culinary options to our guests."

— Jim Lux, vice president of IT, Boloco

As the restaurants grew more popular, Boloco wanted to keep lines moving and ordering efficient.

"We wanted to offer a variety of channels for people to order, including mobile and Facebook," said Jim Lux, vice president of IT for Boloco. "Kiosks were another way for us to increase speed of service, while still providing unparalleled culinary options to our guests."

At the same time, Boloco wanted to keep its emphasis on guest service, without having to exponentially increase staff.

“The goal wasn’t for kiosks to replace our team members,” Lux said. “But we wanted to use our people differently, and have them focus more on enhancing the customer experience, and not on simply taking orders.”

The solution

Boloco was introduced to NEXTEP at the 2009 National Restaurant Association show, and by 2010, the restaurant was beginning to install both kiosks and digital menu displays.

“It took about eight weeks from the time the agreement was made to the time the installation was complete,” said Rick Wibel, sales manager for NEXTEP. “We assigned a project manager and Boloco had a project manager, and they really worked together to make sure everything went smoothly.”

The kiosks emulate a traditional ordering pattern, making it easy for customers to use. A major part of Boloco’s menu is allowing guests to create their own burritos, or customize existing menu items (i.e., substituting meats, choosing different sauces, etc.). The kiosks needed to be able to offer all the various options to customers, and allow them to easily select what they wanted. The kiosks also are programmed to do any upselling, such as suggesting a drink or a side item.

Once the order is placed, guests can pay at the kiosk via credit card or their registered Boloco card. The kiosk then transmits the order to the kitchen, and guests can pick up their order at the counter, bypassing any need to approach a register. Staff that normally would be at the register instead are free to help guests at the kiosk, if



Kiosks that emulate a traditional ordering pattern and accept payment keep lines moving and customers satisfied.

needed, or can focus on other customer service enhancements.

The kiosks also accept loyalty cards, so customers can use their cards and the store can continue to gather valuable data about customer preferences.

The results

Boloco has installed 12 kiosks in four restaurants, with more expected as new restaurants open.

The response to the kiosks has been positive.

“The kiosks give us another touch point and a way to get more guests in the store,” Lux said.

With more order points, Boloco can serve more guests. Still, it’s important to keep the lines moving. By freeing up staff from taking orders, and by increasing efficiency in the ordering process, not only can Boloco serve more guests, it can do so quickly.



Automatic upselling has increased ticket averages by 16 percent.

The kiosks also can do suggestive upselling automatically, leading to increased ticket prices. Check averages in stores with the kiosks are up 16 percent.

The technology also helps maintain Boloco's atmosphere of an innovative concept on the cutting edge. While that can't be measured in dollars and cents, it does help enhance the brand. Many of Boloco's locations are near universities, and its customers skew to a younger demographic, who are accustomed to using technology to make their lives easier.

"Our goal is to make it easy for our customers to use our brand on their terms," Lux said. "Kiosks are another order point for our guests, and while they won't ever 100 percent replace our cashiers, they are important to our growth in the future."

As for NEXTEP, Lux said Boloco plans to continue its partnership.

"They've been a great partner," he said. "We're still learning how to best deploy kiosks, and NEXTEP has been a great partner."

About the sponsor: NEXTEP SYSTEMS, based in Troy, Mich., is a leading provider of self-service solutions for restaurants, casinos, airports, stadiums, arenas, delicatessens and other high-volume food-service venues. NEXTEP's core business revolves around self-service kiosks, online/smartphone ordering and digital menu boards.