

## Self-order Kiosks Help Boost Food Sales at MinitMart

Foodservice sales at Nittany MinitMart have risen nearly 10 percent since the company deployed NEXTEP's self-order kiosks.

By Richard Slawsky  
Contributing editor  
KioskMarketplace.com

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### The players

NEXTEP SYSTEMS, based in Troy, Mich., is a leading 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/smartphone ordering and digital menu boards.

Nittany Oil Co., based in State College, Pa., started as a family business in the 1960s. The company has since grown to be one of the largest heating oil distributors in central Pennsylvania, with more than 200,000 customers and approximately 75 dealers. The company also operates Nittany MinitMarts, a chain of 24 convenience stores that serve a full menu of prepared food including sandwiches, pizza and breakfast items.

### The challenge

Nittany MinitMart faces some stiff competition in Central Pennsylvania. Its closest competitor operates nearly 400 stores in six states, so Nittany has to continually look for ways to innovate.

At the same time, the company is working to remain competitive in an economic downturn that has hit the eastern United States particularly hard.

"We understand the importance of food service, especially with the way gas margins are now," said Marsha Lewis, director of convenience stores for Nittany Oil. "We are doing everything we can to try to increase food service sales."

In 2006, in an effort to boost sales of its cook-to-order foods, the company installed touchscreen self-order kiosks in two of

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*NEXTEP's self-order kiosks feature a full-color display with ordering instructions and images of the various menu items, making the machines easy to use.*

its locations. Unfortunately, those kiosks didn't quite live up to their promise.

"They were hard to use and hard for the customers to understand," Lewis said. "They just seemed to involve a lot of button-pushing that wasn't necessary."

Still, Lewis was able to see the potential of the concept. Done correctly, she thought, a self-order kiosk could deliver an enhanced customer experience and boost sales through its ability to upsell.

### The solution

In 2008, Nittany MinitMarts replaced its original two self-order kiosks with ones designed by NEXTEP SYSTEMS. The company also placed kiosks in three additional MinitMart locations

"We did a lot of research, and the NEXTEP SYSTEMS touchscreens are hands down

the most user-friendly we have found," Lewis said. "We wanted to move our operation to the next level"

The NEXTEP SYSTEMS kiosks feature a full-color display with ordering instructions and images of the various menu items. Customers simply enter their order, take the receipt to the cashier and wait for their number to be called.

"NEXTEP makes great efforts to ensure that we deliver the most intuitive, branded user interfaces possible. Guests need to be able to use our kiosks their first time with no training or help for us to consider the project a success," said NEXTEP president Tommy Woycik.

The kiosks also give the company the ability to manage menus and pricing from the corporate office, ensuring that every MinitMart location offers a consistent ordering experience.

Although Lewis considered a solution that included the ability for the customer to pay at the kiosk, she eventually decided against it.

“We have so many other items in our stores that we don’t want to do anything to inhibit the ability of a customer to purchase additional items,” she said. “We don’t want to make them have to do two transactions.”

### The results

Since the initial rollout in late 2008, the company has placed NEXTEP SYSTEMS kiosks in 20 of its 24 locations. The last four stores are currently undergoing remodels, and plans are in place to outfit those locations with self-order kiosks once the remodels are complete.

“We would pick five stores, install the touchscreens, evaluate them and move to the next set of five,” Lewis said. “We just finished up the last group in December 2010.”

Along with making for an improved experience for customers, Nittany MinitMarts have seen food sales increase by 8 to 10 percent once the kiosks were deployed.

“NEXTEP was very pleased to see Nittany MinitMarts enjoying the same positive return on investment as our customers in other vertical markets. We expect other convenience store chains to recognize Nittany Oil as a thought leader in self-service,” Woycik said.



Since deploying the kiosks, Nittany MinitMarts seen food sales increase by 8 to 10 percent.

Nittany Oil plans to add an additional two to four MinitMarts each year, and self-order kiosks from NEXTEP SYSTEMS are slated to be a part of every new location, Lewis said.

“Absolutely, they are part of our plan as we move forward,” she said. “NEXTEP SYSTEMS has been very helpful and we couldn’t be more pleased with the results we’ve experienced.”

*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.*