

Hospital benefits from sterling service



By Patrick Avery, editor

Vending company uses automated retail solution to provide quick service to hospital employees, guests

The background

Freedom Shopping is a self-checkout retail kiosk business that uses radio-frequency identification (RFID) in convenience store, hospital-ity, other retail and vending spaces. Sterling Services is a foodservice management and vending company serving the Detroit metropolitan area.

The Freedom Shopping unit allows customers to use cash, credit card or a pre-loaded account accessed through a magnetic-stripped card or thumbprint.

The challenge

Sterling Services and its vending services have evolved during the course of their existence. After using traditional vending services when the company was founded in 1986, the vending and catering business now uses technology that is on the cutting edge and easy for customers to use, said Ray Friedrich, general manager of Sterling Services.

But it wasn't always so easy at one of Sterling's vending locations. Garden City Hospital, located on the outskirts of Detroit, had a hard time keeping its machines stocked and an even harder time keeping its vending area staffed.



Sterling sought a self-service solution that would provide hospital staff and patrons quality food without the need for staff.

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“They wanted a premium foodservice offering for their evening and night staff, but couldn’t afford a manned store,” said Rob Simmons, a Freedom Shopping managing partner.

The solution

To meet the foodservice needs of Garden City Hospital, Sterling enlisted the services of Freedom Shopping and its K1 RFID Self-Checkout Kiosk. The self-checkout unit automatically detects RFID-tagged merchandise as it is presented for purchase.

Sterling Services and Garden City Hospital collaborated to design a Fast Track Convenience store that is centrally located on the first floor of the hospital. The Freedom Shopping kiosk serves as a customer’s check-out point, as well as an easy-to-use store management system. The self-checkout unit allows customers to use cash, credit card or a pre-loaded account accessed through a magnetic-striped card or thumbprint.

Friedrich said the technology is one of a kind.

“This has the potential to change the vending industry as we know it,” he said. “There is nothing like this that gives you the return on investment that you want.”



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Simmons said people like the kiosk and RFID technology because it's accessible and easy to use.

"It's a superior customer experience because one can browse the merchandise and there is only one step to a purchase," he said.

The result

The deployment of the self-checkout kiosk in the hospital's convenience store has led to increased sales, Friedrich said. In fact, he said he believes people are buying more items because the kiosk is so easy to use.

Sterling Services has opened, and will continue to do so, other Fast Track Convenience stores in locations such as Ford Motor Co. and at a Detroit area high school.

"I would never have imagined anything like this technology," Friedrich said. "It has allowed us to leapfrog the challengers."

And Freedom Shopping is seeing incredible demand for its product, as well.

"We are increasingly offering employers and institutions a solution to a problem they all share — how to get a wide range of amenities to colleagues and guests on a 24/7 basis and thus enhance the workplace with a minimum cost," Simmons said.