

Mall sends shoppers cell phone messages

Gateway Theatre of Shopping wanted a personal way to communicate with customers and sought a method that would be low-cost, easily implemented, flexible with regard to media content, innovative, non-intrusive and quantifiable.

The only tool meeting all those criteria was Bluetooth, the short-range wireless technology that links PCs, PDAs, cell phones and more. Gateway now uses Bluetooth to transmit promotional messages to customers via their cell phones.

Implementation

People increasingly use cell phones not only for calls but for text messaging and video games and as cameras and palm-top computers, among other functions.

Gateway wanted to use Bluetooth for marketing, but at the time it was not commercially available in Gateway's area. So with a Bluetooth specialist, the center undertook an exhaustive process to create a software system to perform the required customer communications.

It set up zones within the center, covering as much of the mall space as possible, where Bluetooth works, allowing Gateway to communicate directly with shoppers without going through cell-phone networks.

The content of the communication is easily changed and can be delivered in a variety of formats: MP3 files, video, audio, text or GIF files, which allow a series of "slides," similar to a PowerPoint display.

Messages are sent only to people who agree to the service and enable their cell phones to accept Bluetooth. When they enter a Bluetooth zone, they receive notice of an incoming message. If the customer rejects it, they won't receive another within 24 hours. If they ignore it, the message disappears when the customer leaves the Bluetooth zone.

When a customer accepts the message, a GIF file plays. Its first screen welcomes the shopper, the next few advertise events or sales and the last is a generic Gateway screen. Shoppers can store the message in their phones' calendar/appointments folder to get a reminder beep on the day of the event.

Bluetooth offers several advantages for Gateway. There's no cost per individual customer; it requires no paper; messages can be easily and frequently changed; the center can allow shoppers



to enter contests by responding to messages without filling out paper forms; stores can advertise sales directly to their patrons; and the system lets Gateway track how many messages were accepted, and by whom.

Results

Initial results showed a primary reach of 13 percent of all detected phones, a figure Gateway expects to increase as the public becomes more acquainted with the system. In the first week, shoppers accepted 1,290 messages; the number has increased weekly, and Gateway predicts a more dramatic rise as it moves out of the launch phase into a random prize giveaway and later a loyalty program. The number of Bluetooth-enabled phones is growing each month.

Tenants' feedback about the number of shoppers who claimed discounts or offers advertised via Bluetooth proved the public was reading the messages. Media coverage of the Bluetooth Zone had a publicity value of \$4,320.19.

Finally, Gateway has captured a huge amount of information from the personal details that shoppers transferred to its database. ■

BlueTooth Zone

Gateway Theatre of Shopping
Durban, South Africa

Expenses: \$64,928

Owned/Managed by: Old Mutual Properties (PTY)

Professional Recognition: Michael Rodel, regional general manager, Sue Jagesur, marketing manager, Lifestyle Communications