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> Serving the Underserved

## Serving the Underserved

May 10, 2010 12:00 PM, By CHRISTINA VEIDERS



KIOSKS HAVE ADVANCED to networked-wireless information outlets that are now being used in diagnostic health testing. As such, kiosks have the potential to drive new customer traffic to supermarket pharmacies for free medical information. In turn, supermarkets are providing a community service and have a chance to build loyalty and additional sales.



EyeSite attracts thousands of shoppers.

The devices have the capability to zero in on specific ethnic populations that may be prone to certain chronic health conditions.

EyeSite from Atlanta-based SoloHealth is a relatively new concept being tested at supermarkets at about 100 locations in Birmingham, Houston, St. Louis, Richmond, Salt Lake City, Atlanta and Madison, Wis.

Grocery chains currently testing the devices, which provide free eye vision assessments, are Kroger, H.E. Butt Grocery, Harris Teeter, Schnuck Markets and Smith's Food and Drug.

Advertising and local doctors' sponsorship fees support the kiosks' financial model.

Users answer a series of questions about their overall health. The device then measures near and distant vision. Once the process is complete, the user receives a printout of the test and a list of local doctors in the area for further referrals.

◆ We are focused on three things ◆ awareness, education and action. The action is putting consumers in touch with local health care providers, ◆ said Bart Foster, chief executive officer of SoloHealth. Foster worked for Novartis where the eye care kiosk was first developed.

Supermarkets are positioning the kiosks as a free health and wellness service for their shoppers and for their potential to drive traffic and product sales.

Since testing began last year, over 350,000 users have generated a lot of data, Foster pointed out.

◆ Our competitive differentiator is how we push and pull information, and it is all wirelessly connected, ◆ he explained. Based on how the user answers a series of questions on their demographics and general health, Foster said the kiosk delivers ◆ a customer-centric message that is one-on-one with the user. If you are African American [there is a question on ethnicity] and you are over 40 you are about five times more likely to have glaucoma. ◆ The kiosk will deliver that specific health information.

Nearly half (49%) of those who have used the kiosk come from ethnic backgrounds. Foster noted that about 18% who have taken the eye tests take it in Spanish. The devices are programmed to be bilingual.

Kiosk usage is high among those in the lower socioeconomic and middle-income demographic. Nearly a quarter of users are African American.

◆ We see this as being the front porch of health care for millions of people, ◆ said Foster.

Mike Juergemeyer, vice president of fuel and pharmacy for Schnuck Markets, St. Louis, used the kiosk to see if it accurately assessed his slightly nearsighted vision. It was dead on and provided other useful eye-health information, he said.

Schnucks has been testing the kiosk for the last nine months at 30 stores in the St. Louis market. The retailer located the kiosks near the pharmacy, a high-traffic area that tends to have a captive audience while patients wait for their prescription to be filled. In generating doctor referrals, Schnucks' kiosks list about 120 doctors in the St. Louis area who have paid a sponsorship fee to be listed on the kiosk.

Juergemeyer said they are pulling in 10,000 visits a month. ◆ That's fairly good considering it's not a blood pressure monitor where you are coming in every month to monitor your blood pressure. It's a bunch of new people checking out the eye care kiosk, ◆ he told *SN*.

The kiosk will eventually evolve into a general health and wellness station that tests blood pressure, Body Mass Index and stress levels, as well as recommends diet and exercise. That is the future.

◆ As new technology becomes available, if we can integrate it [health care assessments] that makes a lot of sense. It is a free service for our customers and gives them an opportunity to monitor their own health. More people are looking for self-assessments and it fits in with the lifestyles of our customers, ◆ said Juergemeyer.

Of the 325,000 people who have used the EyeSite kiosk, here are some other key findings:

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- 25% had never had an eye exam.
- 66% did not have vision insurance.
- 37% failed the near-vision test.
- 41% failed the distance test.
- 52% were male users; 48% were female users.
- 80% of those tested were directed to see an eye care professional.
- Age of core demographic using the device is 18-49-year-olds.

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