KEEPING UP

Government-based programs boost reliability with remote management

Marvin Lazaro

The lifeblood of kiosks is the software that keeps them operational. Without it, consumers would not be able to withdraw money, check prices or speed through self-checkouts. But the software that relays information back to the deployer or informs him when something is wrong is just as important.

Remote Management Software (RMS) lets deployers monitor and manage their machines anytime, anywhere, and take action to solve problems before a kiosk becomes ineffective. Usage data can be collected, repairs can be performed remotely, content updates can be distributed and maintenance and service can be expedited, all through RMS.

The Michigan Department of Motor Vehicles and the Florida Department of Transportation are two state departments that currently use RMS applications from Esprida Corp. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development also employs the software. Two of the applications expedite service to consumers while the third collects and disseminates information for research and auditing.

DRIVEN TO EXCEL

The Michigan DMV first deployed its kiosks in 2005. The self-service devices allow consumers to renew license plates 24 hours a day.

The RMS offered by Esprida enables the department to monitor and manage the entire network of kiosks from a central location. The kiosks scan a consumer's barcode, confirm the information and dispense new license tabs.

THE SOFTWARE THAT RELAYS INFORMATION BACK TO THE DEPLOYER OR INFORMS HIM WHEN SOMETHING IS WRONG IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE SOFTWARE THAT KEEPS KIOSKS OPERATIONAL.

"The system has a set of rules that it runs and goes through, enabling it to fix itself," said Bevan Hayes, director of client services for Esprida. "It will notify a branch manager, for example, or the central help desk when service is needed."

Hayes said a set of "escalation rules" also are in place, which are based upon time or condition changes. For example, a printer will trigger alerts when low on paper. If not addressed, the alerts will escalate to other personnel.

"The software does what it's supposed to — it increases machine uptime significantly," Hayes said. "And if they're down, we know why. And that translates into a significant cost savings because a technician will already know the problem before leaving to service the kiosk. There will be no surprises."

Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land demonstrates the Michigan DMV's self-service station in the Grand Rapids-area SUPER Center.

BUILDING ON EXCELLENCE

Florida is another state that uses the Esprida RMS. In this case, the application is designed to collect information from Department of Transportation construction projects.

Hayes said Florida's DOT uses sensors embedded in concrete piles that are used extensively for roadway and bridge foundations. The SmartPile sensors, first deployed in 2005 by Smart Structures Inc., collect data and calculate capacity information during pile driving. An on-site laptop computer collects the data from all the sensors via a Bluetooth connection in real time, which in turn sends it to an Esprida-based central server. The compiled data is stored and made available for future research.

"It gives the construction people a better understanding of what materials may be required or how long construction may take," Hayes said. "And it lets them make continuous improvement to their construction techniques."

Once deployed, the sensors can be used to monitor the long-term condition of the structure and notify emergency agencies of critical events.

HOUSING NETWORK

At the federal level, the Department of Housing and Urban Development currently uses an extensive self-service kiosk network. According to the HUD Web site, the network's goal was to "create an easy-to-use 'ATM' that dispenses government information and services that citizens — particularly low-income citizens and those who do not have ready access to the Internet — can use, in places they frequent."

The Esprida RMS, Hayes said, provides HUD information and metrics on kiosk usage patterns, including page hits and number of users. HUD's Web site says it plans to turn the network into a "Government Services Kiosks" network by inviting other federal agencies to join. ■

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