

Future Communications powers kiosk solution with DB2 and Linux.

Overview

■ **Application**

Web-enabled kiosk management system

■ **Business Benefits**

Projected 200% increase in sales at technology-enhanced kiosks; ability to rollout and manage nationwide kiosk network

■ **Software**

IBM DB2® Universal Database™ Enterprise Edition for Linux®, Version 7.2; Red Hat Linux, Version 7.1

■ **Servers**

IBM NetVista™; IBM @server xSeries™

■ **Services**

IBM Global Services

■ **Business Partners**

Acclink, Ltd
ACCPAC
AGS Software Inc.



With its new kiosk management system based on IBM DB2 Universal Database Enterprise Edition for Linux, Future Communications will rollout 1,500 new kiosks nationwide.

In search of high-traffic, low-cost retail space, marketers of everything from lava lamps to lollipops have turned to the kiosk—a standalone mini-shop positioned at strategic locations on shopping mall concourses and within major retail outlets. The keys to success for a kiosk operation are the same as in any retail business—clever management, systematic employee training and well-thought-out

“DB2 and Linux are tested, world-class products that will help us become a national company.”

*—Wayne Hinerman, CEO,
Future Communications*

e-business—accelerating the pace of business and the pace of change



From the left: Wayne Hinerman, CEO, Future Communications; Charlie Hinerman, President, Future Communications.

accounting and inventory management systems. But because kiosk employees often work unsupervised and inventory storage space is minimal, good communications and sophisticated inventory management systems are even more important. And even though operations are dispersed geographically, all the accounting information has to come together on a daily basis, and accounting practices must be adhered to consistently and rigorously.

Future Communications dba Future Cellular—central Ohio's largest Verizon Wireless agent—knows this from experience. Based in Columbus, Ohio, Future Communications offers a large selection of cellular phones, accessories, prepaid items and nationwide cellular service. The company opened its first kiosks in 1996, and now has 32 kiosks throughout Ohio.

Until recently, Future Communications had managed its kiosk operations through field managers who traveled from kiosk to kiosk, keeping track of inventory and financial results. Using manual, paper-based reporting, however, the field management staff found it difficult to keep the kiosks properly stocked and report sales figures to the corporate accounting department on a timely basis. It was also a challenge for the managers to provide sales representatives the training and supervision they required.

Fortunately, the company is anticipating more efficient operations with its new kiosk management system based on IBM DB2 Universal Database Enterprise Edition for Linux, Version 7.2 and ACCPAC accounting software. The first four newly improved kiosks are about to be rolled out. With the new system enabling better inventory control and more comprehensive customer and financial data, Future Communications expects to triple its kiosk-based sales and implement a nationwide kiosk network.

“Our total solution for kiosk management uses best-of-breed hardware, software and support. DB2 and Linux are tested, world-class products that will help us become a national company,” says Wayne Hinerman, CEO of Future Communications.

“With Linux on the xSeries server, Future Communications has a cost-effective, high-performance infrastructure, which will scale to support its growth.”

—Paul Wong, VP of Technology, AGS Software Inc.

Designing a more efficient kiosk

When Future Communications began thinking of an integrated kiosk management system, the company envisioned combining front-end operations with backend accounting. In addition, the system would enable video conferencing, which customers visiting the kiosks could use to communicate with product experts. Field managers could use the videoconferencing capability to train and supervise the kiosk operators.

Over a two-year period, Future Communications searched the market for easy-to-use point-of-sale (POS) software that could be used to populate a backend accounting and inventory control system. Then the company discovered IBM Business Partner Acmlink, Ltd., a Columbus, Ohio-based ACCPAC reseller. Acmlink offered Future Communications an ACCPAC solution integrated with ePOS, a POS product developed by Toronto-based IBM Business Partner AGS Software Inc. The cellular vendor knew it had its solution, and decided to proceed rolling out a new kiosk management solution with 1,500 new kiosks nationwide.

While DB2 is one of several databases that the ACCPAC accounting software supports, it is the one that AGS Software recommended to Future



Using more efficient management and integrated accounting software from ACCPAC, Future Cellular expects to triple sales.

Communications for its kiosk management system. “We knew from the number of stores Future Communications had in mind that the volume of data and transactions would be enormous,” says AGS Software VP of Technology Paul Wong. “So we recommended DB2 because it is a stable, reliable database that would handle huge data volumes.” For a cost-effective and reliable operating system, AGS Software also recommended Linux on the IBM **@server** xSeries platform. “With Linux on the xSeries server, Future Communications has a cost-effective, high-performance infrastructure, which will scale to support its growth,” says Wong.

Built with room to grow

Future Communications’ kiosk management system is based on ACCPAC applications and DB2 on the xSeries servers running Red Hat Linux Version 7.1, with IBM NetVista desktops serving as Web-enabled POS terminals. When the time comes to expand, Future Communications can grow cost-effectively simply by adding servers.

Future Communications also leveraged IBM Global Financing and relies on IBM Global Services to support the entire kiosk network. A third-party videoconferencing system, which runs on the NetVista screens, rounds out the solution.

Using the videoconferencing feature, Future Communications managers can supervise and train employees and interact with customers to provide information and advice when necessary.

Lean, mean selling machine

When the new kiosks are unveiled, the easy-to-use ePOS interfaces from AGS Software will enable sales representatives to search for inventory and enter purchases and payments supplying all the information that Future Communications' accounting package requires. Since sales are automatically deducted from inventory, field managers at Future Communications headquarters will receive regular, accurate reports on stock turnover and replenishment requirements. The system also generates customer profiles and reports on customer buying patterns that enable the company to develop personalized offers for repeat buyers, either through the mail or right at the kiosk.

The ACCPAC accounting package also accommodates special pricing and credit limits for resellers, should they become involved in the business. Complex discount structures can be set at headquarters and published globally to all Future Cellular points of sale. And, in the background, DB2 for Linux drills

through complex applications and mountains of customer, product and transaction data without a hitch.

"This flexible, easy-to-use system empowers the sales representatives at the kiosks with sophisticated selling tools and keeps the financials for the entire company on track," comments Future Communications President Charlie Hinerman. "It wouldn't be much use, however, if the database crashed or the operating system froze up. And our tests show that DB2 and Linux are rock solid."

Future diversification

In addition to rolling out 1,500 installations nationwide, Future Communications also has the option of generating new revenue streams by licensing its kiosk management system to other companies that sell through kiosks. With its solid infrastructure, the company believes that selling the system should be easy. Says Wayne Hinerman, "IBM and ACCPAC are well-known and well-respected names, so we won't have any trouble convincing prospects that the technology is sound. DB2 in itself is a strong marketing proposition for a product like ours."

For more information

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For more information about Future Communications, Acclink, Ltd., ACCPAC or AGS Software Inc., visit:

www.futurecellular.com

www.acclinkltd.com

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Corporate Marketing
New Orchard Road
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02-02
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