

Sidewalk Shopping Comes of Age

By Rick Redding, Kioskcom
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New York, New York: For Paul Zaengle, Vice President of Interactive Technology at Polo Ralph Lauren, it's a way of giving the company's customers another convenient way to interact with the company.

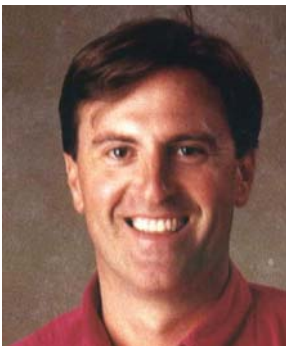
For Alex Richardson, Polo Ralph Lauren kiosk consultant, the new Interactive Store Window serves as a powerful marketing tool for the stores while offering customers convenient access to the world of Ralph

Lauren through online purchases.

The result is an innovative, first-of-its-kind kiosk project that's getting rave reviews at the Madison Avenue store where it was installed August 7. Zaengle said the reaction from customers has been positive and intriguing.

It's amazing," he said, noting that he and his staff have been spending a lot of time observing reaction to the device. "One-third to one-half of people stop and take a look at it. It's been great. It was really a test, just to see if people would do it (order products) at all."

Zaengle said customers have the option of placing an order, then sending themselves an e-mail to add their payment via credit card. Or, they can swipe a credit card on the window's card reader and complete their purchase on the spot. And most importantly, they can place those orders any time, 24/7. For the duration of the promotion (it ends Sept. 10, along with the U.S. Open), a security guard is stationed near the window to help customers and provide a secure environment.



Alex Richardson
Managing Director of
Selling Machine Partners, LLC

Alex Richardson, Managing Director of Selling Machine Partners, who has been involved in more than 200 retail store projects involving kiosks and digital signage, was the chief kiosk merchandising consultant for Polo Ralph Lauren. He is also the President of the Self Service and Industry Association and a member of the Kiosk Hall of Fame.



*Polo Ralph Lauren's Interactive Store Window
Madison Avenue, New York City, USA*

“Polo Ralph Lauren understands their consumer better than any other luxury retailer in the marketplace. They have a tradition of listening closely to their consumers and developing innovative ways of interacting with the brand,” said Richardson, who started his consulting practice after founding Netkey, and then leaving in 2003.

“Kiosks are an iceberg of complexity and Paul’s team is the best that I’ve ever seen in my two decades of experience,” he said. “They’re very smart about getting the best resources. In addition, David Lauren, Senior VP of Marketing, is a genius at coming up with a customer-focused vision that Paul’s team can execute.”

All the design and technology work was completed by Polo’s in-house Interactive Agency, Zaengle said, and Richardson is the lone outside resource involved in the project.



Polo Ralph Lauren’s Interactive Store Window reinvents the Retail Store Window with a Credit Card Reader mounted on the exterior store window—allows 24/7 Window Shopping

“Alex was our guiding light on this thing. We have a talented team of technology experts and designers. We had the skills to design and build it, but we had no kiosk expertise,” said Zaengle, who learned about the kiosk industry at KioskCom in Las Vegas last spring. “Alex pointed us in the right direction, and gave us tips on vendors, user interfaces and other aspects of the project.”

Polo has been planning this technology onslaught for some time. The second part of the promotion is a virtual store at the U.S. Open, where tennis fans can order product at seven-foot tall kiosks on the site, then choose to have it shipped to their home or pick it up on-site from Polo staff members.

The virtual store is similar in some ways to the J.C. Penney virtual store, which the retailing giant operated in Times Square in March. The Penney store was designed so that shoppers could make purchases on kiosks and ship them

home. Zaengle said his team was already working on its virtual store when it heard about the Penney experiment, but that he and his staff studied the project.

“This is better because you can walk away with the product,” he said.

Once the U.S. Open ends, Zaengle said he’ll look for other ways to use the technology. When the Madison Avenue store’s window changes, the touchscreen window may be

redesigned to match another campaign. Polo will also consider taking the virtual store concept to other stores and events.

Whether other retailers will copy the technology is not clear. Inspired by the movie “Minority Report” and encouraged by Polo senior vice president David Lauren, the technology has drawn plenty of attention from media, consumers and, no doubt, competing retailers.

“The store window is like the attract loop on a kiosk,” Richardson said. “It hasn’t been touched in 100 years. David Lauren and Paul’s team understand the role of relevance in digital merchandising. Relevance is derived from the merchandising and promotional tools you use and infrastructure you build.”

The Interactive Store Window combines the best in classic retail merchandising with the best in interactive and digital technology.

At Polo Ralph Lauren, the store window and the virtual store for the U.S. Open are just the beginning of new technology offerings, Zaengle said.

“The U.S. Open will tell us a lot. We’re planning to test a similar concept inside our retail stores next. It’s all about convenience for the customers and elevating the brand.”

Meanwhile, Richardson’s Selling Machine Partners may be on the cutting edge of a new retail strategy, but he warns that it’s a difficult and costly effort that should only be attempted by firms that have all their eCommerce and Retail Building Blocks in place.

“The test of success for any new digital channel is whether or not it can make the cash register ring,” Richardson said.