

Self-Service Technology Brings Bingo up to Scratch

Full House

By Anne Warner

On March 31st 2006, Rank opened the Fountain Park Mecca Bingo club in Edinburgh to the public. Inside, gamers interact with 540 electronic terminals, transforming the image of Bingo forever. With futuristic lighting, touch screen games and electronic payment methods, Mecca Bingo has greatly increased both the number of gamers they attract and the amount of money they spend.

At the beginning of 2006, Rank went in search for a new way of presenting the game of Bingo. Having done previously trials in electronic gaming, Rank was already aware of the potential of replacing the pen and paper game and wanted to find the technology to create a whole new buzz about bingo.

"I want our customers to be excited!" said Mario Vilela, director of electronic gaming at Rank Group. "I want them to experience a bingo club unlike any other!"

Put Away Your Pens

Mecca Bingo wanted to use touch-screen terminals instead of paper cards, but was concerned about the reliability of systems as the number of game players increased. Rank had to strike a balance between attracting a new generation of players whilst retaining existing customers.

"Bingo has not changed from a manual, pen and paper-based game in more than 500 years," said Vilela. "But with competition from electronic gaming and consoles, we needed

new ways to present the game to capture a larger market."

Bingo has reinvented itself over recent years to appeal to a younger generation. For example, there was a realistic opportunity to serve the 'hen and stag' crowd in the UK. Rank's objectives included attracting new players for the first time, increasing players' repeat visit frequency, and lengthening the time customers spend in the club. So it decided to pilot IBM Anyplace Kiosks at its large newly-built site in Edinburgh, installing more than 540 terminals.

Meal Ticket

ECM Systems, an IBM Partner in the UK, has been a partner of Rank Group for many years. In 2005 it provided the e-bingo software for a part-electronic club, enhancing the player's gaming experience using personalised offers and win celebrations. Huge plasma displays were also positioned around the club to display special themes and promotions. Rank wanted to expand

this solution, incorporating food and drink ordering from the bingo table, something which specialist Xpress Ordering knows a lot about.

Xpress Ordering, another IBM Partner, was able to provide a customer self-ordering solution. Working closely with Rank, a new touch screen-based food & beverage ordering application was developed, allowing customers to place orders at the gaming point without the need to leave their seat, as waiter service was provided along with electronic payment.

Rank selected IBM's Anyplace Kiosk as the gaming terminal – part of an IBM hardware infrastructure designed to increase usability and playability, whilst decreasing the risks inherent with running such a large scale site. Over 540 infra-red touch screens were installed, which at the time was the largest single site installation in the world for IBM's AnyPlace Kiosk product. Key to the success of the project was the integration of the ECM & Xpress Ordering software to create a single solution package.



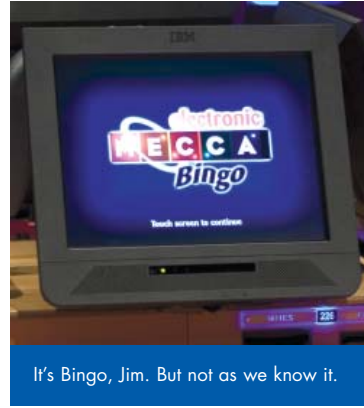
Sound and Vision

The high clarity dual bulb infra-red IBM touch screen technology allows players to play an unlimited number of bingo games at any one time. The infra-red technology enables superb touch accuracy and the ability to fully seal the unit from its environment. The lack of film across the screen improves brightness and clarity. The user-friendly touch screen terminals allow players to participate in an unlimited number of games at one time, increasing revenue, and the kiosks can also accommodate other features like hospitality ordering and video / music downloading. The club's tables also have lighting features that change colour and produce sounds that can be heard at individual terminals or throughout the club.

According to Mario Vilela: "We are very pleased with the solution delivered into our newest Mecca Bingo Club at Fountain Park. Superior usability and reliability is key to our success. We're stepping into the realms of the unknown, but we are doing so with superb support from our partner vendors. The technology makes bingo an exciting, reaction-based game where customers are entertained. It can recall preferences and offer customers their preferred games, food or drinks."

Vilela also said that spending per head has increased because customers can make purchases from the comfort of their seat, and that the game pricing should soon pay for the costs of implementing the technology.

Once the pilot has been successfully completed, the solution will be rolled out to further Mecca Bingo sites across the United Kingdom.



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