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Subject: FW: Government Technology article from a colleague

FYI - An interesting article.

Out and About Service

A handful of governments bring one-stop shopping to a new level. By Emily Montandon
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The Internet brought government services home to constituents, and now some governments are using kiosks to bring the same self-service ease to places we shop. The kiosks not only bring convenience to constituents who use them, but ease congestion in government offices.

In 2002, only 18 percent of Arkansas' vehicle tag renewals were done via Internet, phone or mail, according to Fred Porter, administrator of the Arkansas Office of Motor Vehicles. The remaining 82 percent of drivers renewed their vehicle tags in a State Revenue Office. "We're trying to pull traffic away and give better service," said Porter.

But the only way for citizens renewing tags to complete transactions with the vehicle tags in hand is by going to a State Revenue Office during normal business hours and paying with cash or check. Credit card processing is only done on the Internet or by phone.

Now the Office of Motor Vehicles is rolling out kiosks, in partnership with Wal-Mart, that will allow tag renewers to go to participating Wal-Marts, renew tags at their convenience and pay with the method of their choice, as well as walk out the door with a new vehicle decal.

"Wal-Mart offers all the options, [like] 24/7 service, so you don't have to take off work to do it," he said. "You get product in hand when you buy it, and you can pay by credit card or even your Wal-Mart gift card if you have one of those."

People who want to renew their tags enter information from their renewal notice into the kiosk, which is located next to the customer service desk. When the information is entered, the kiosk checks Motor Vehicle databases in real time to ensure property tax and liability insurance for the vehicle in question are current, and then displays the vehicle information for verification.

Porter said only the minimum amount of information necessary for verification is displayed, such as license plate number and year, and make and model of the car.

"It's not going to put your name and address on there so that pervert behind you can see it," he said.

If all requirements are met, the kiosk prints an invoice with a bar code that tells the renewers how much they owe. Citizens take the invoices to any cashier, along with any other items they choose to buy. The bar code is scanned and the money owed is added to their total. Once the renewal fee is paid, the citizen scans the bar code at the kiosk and tags are automatically printed at the service desk. Users can also pay invoices at the service desk if they don't want to wander around the store.

Communication between kiosks and the Office of Motor Vehicles is in real

time, so when drivers leave the store, their status has already been updated on Motor Vehicle Office computers. That's one less person who will make a trip to the office, Porter said.

"For people who do have to go to the tag office, that person's not going to be standing in line in front of them," he added.

Porter said theft isn't a problem because the tags are printed for each transaction. Blank decals have no value.

Partners for Better Service

For the five-store pilot launched in May 2002, 3M developed the technology to print the decals, and provided toner, registration certificates and printers at no charge. 3M won the contract to continue providing after the statewide rollout in October 2002 through a competitive bidding process, according to Porter. The kiosks will be located in 51 stores.

Kiosks and their programming were provided by Wal-Mart.

The Office of Motor Vehicles will pay Wal-Mart \$1 per transaction for the first 18 months, said Porter, and 50 cents per transaction thereafter. Porter said the agreement with Wal-Mart is nonexclusive, so the state could place kiosks in other stores.

Wal-Mart Spokeswoman Sharon Weber said Wal-Mart's decision to implement the kiosks was to bring more choice and convenience to its customers.

"When you have a busy schedule, the idea is sometimes it's just impossible to get down to the license bureau to get that paperwork done. So this offers a nice alternative," she said. "It really is a lot about choice and helping our customers make the most of their shopping experience."

Keeping up with Demand

Chris Hughes, tax collector for Okaloosa County, Fla., is also trying to take transactions out of the office and into mainstream thoroughfares. His office has installed a kiosk in the local mall's food court, where citizens can access his Web site to look up information or use their credit card to pay property taxes, renew their vehicle registration, and purchase hunting and fishing licenses.

Hughes said kiosk technology could help his growing county keep up with demand.

"Some months we have over 20,000 car tag renewals. That's a lot of people standing in line, and a lot of unhappy voters if they have to stand in line," he said. "So our goal was to place these machines where they would be already. I don't think you're as mad if you go to Wal-Mart or the mall and wait behind one or two people than if you come to my office and have to wait behind 30 or 40 people.

"By having a kiosk that could provide full service, I may not have to open new offices as our county grows," he continued.

Hughes said constituents can also use the kiosk to make payments to the IRS.

Licenses and renewals are mailed to kiosk users within 24 hours. Hughes said he hopes in the future, tags will be distributed at the kiosk as well.

"Customers shouldn't have to wait for it to be mailed to them in the next 24 hours," he said, noting that at this point the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles has not approved such an action because of concerns about inventory control. "I don't think anyone in broad daylight in the middle of the mall food court is going to take a jackhammer to the machine to break out a decal."

He said he plans to have more kiosks available to shoppers in the future, and is negotiating to place kiosks at the base exchange of a local air force base and Wal-Mart. Hughes also said these kinds of deployments are the future of government.

"I believe more government agencies are going to provide more service to the public -- without having to build a building on a piece of dirt and hire employees -- by using computers and technology," he said. "We're going to provide services faster to the public than ever before and in a more efficient manner by taking it to them in the high traffic areas where they already are."

Additional material may be available for this article online:
<http://www.govtech.net/magazine/story.php?id=83618>