



Supermarket Tests Prescription Refill Kiosk

February 6, 2006

By Elliot Maras

A credit card-enabled, self-service prescription refill kiosk is in pilot at supermarket chain Giant Food at a specific store in Virginia, in a test being monitored by the regional Board of Pharmacy, according to ConvenienceStoreNews.online.com. Later this year, a similar pilot is to run in Maryland, where pharmacy customers will also be able to obtain refill prescriptions by keying usernames, passwords and payment card details into the kiosks before selecting their prescriptions. The kiosks are larger than a standard ATM due to holding multiple prescriptions for retrieval and verifying all orders before delivery into the deposit bin.

Although the kiosk could provide 24/7 service if configured to do so, Virginia Board of Pharmacy regulations limit its operation to one hour before Giant Food's opening time, and two hours after closing time. During the pilot, the Board of Pharmacy will seek to establish that customers are serviced in the best possible way in terms of safety, and that pharmacies retain the human touch. Customers buying maintenance prescriptions are the primary market for the kiosk, but over time, the store expects its convenience to attract some currently who buy refill prescriptions by mail.

After a one-time customer registration process in which usernames and passwords are assigned, the pharmacist deposits customers' prescription refill orders into the machine as requested, for later retrieval. Since Giant Food operates 191 supermarkets in the states of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia, 162 of which have full-service pharmacies, great potential exists for the supermarket to use kiosks to automate its routine services. In a separate initiative, Giant Food stores in the northeast US are also to roll out DVD rental kiosks at selected stores.

Editor's Insight: VendingMarketWatch has carried several reports recently on the leading role the supermarket industry has taken in automatic retailing. The prescription vending machine is just one of many self-serve conveniences that supermarkets are spearheading.

As the baby boomers age, pharmacies become busier. A vending machine that allows consumers to get prescriptions refilled will reduce the inconvenience of waiting in line.

The rising visibility of vending machines in society benefits all segments of the vending industry. In this sense, prescription vending machines are a welcome development for the traditional vending industry, along with automated gift stores in hotels and airports and DVD machines.

As retailers give consumers more incentive to stay longer on their premises, they will win more sales from traditional vending machines. Vending operators need to adopt convenience enhancing technologies such as credit card readers to keep up with the competition.