

Mars Petcare looks after pets with IBM® AnyPlace Kiosk™

Overview

■ The Challenge

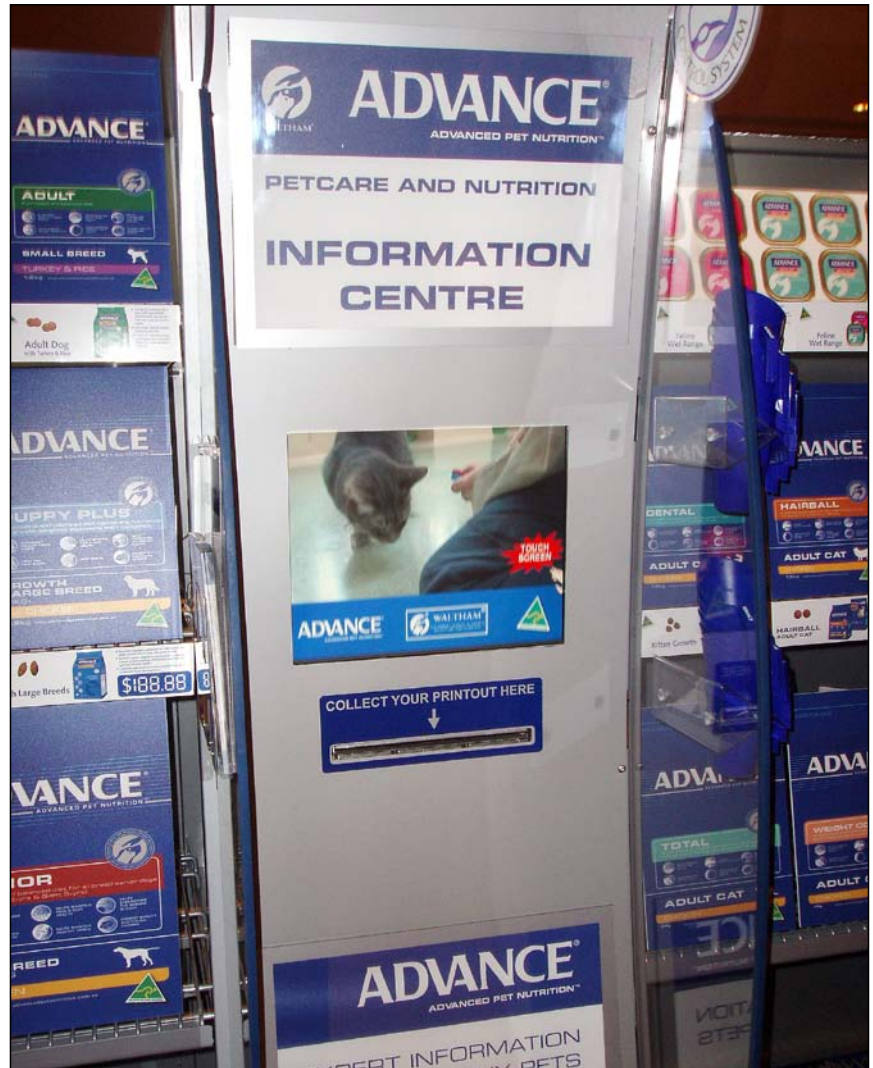
Mars Petcare sells its premium ADVANCE® Pet Nutrition range through pet stores and veterinary clinics. High retail staff turnover meant pet owners weren't being properly informed about its range of pet food products by untrained staff. Mars Petcare needed an easy way to provide pet store staff and their customers with accurate, up-to-date information about its ADVANCE Pet Nutrition brand.

■ Solution

Mars Petcare approached IBM Business Partner[†], Yeahpoint, a winner of the Consensus Software Awards 2007, to develop an in-store information kiosk that educated customers about pet nutrition, disease and behaviour and helped staff to become familiar with its product range more quickly. Yeahpoint created a customised information repository using IBM AnyPlace Kiosk and yeahWARE™, Yeahpoint's award-winning rapid delivery customer self-service application development and management environment.

■ Benefits

With AnyPlace Kiosk and yeahWARE, pet owners can easily find what they need to know about looking after their pets' wellbeing. Staff can direct customers to the kiosk or use it as a training tool, which saves on training costs. Mars Petcare can use data from the kiosks to see what customers are most interested in and ensure they provide stores with appropriate stock. Information can be easily updated or changed, depending on needs and circumstances.



About Mars Petcare

Mars Petcare Australia is a division of Mars, and exports to more than 15 countries. Mars Petcare is a leading manufacturer of pet care and pet food products and household names such as PEDIGREE®, WHISKAS®, MY DOG® and ADVANCE Pet Nutrition.

Mars began in Australia as a confectionery company in 1954, selling the MARS® Bar. Its first Mars Petcare manufacturing facility opened in 1967 in Wodonga, Victoria. Employing more than 2,500 people, the company has six local sites, Petcare manufacturing facilities in Wodonga (Head Office), Bathurst and Brisbane.



Better information about pet care products needed

Mars Petcare distributes its range of pet care products to both veterinary practices and pet retail outlets.

The company wanted to provide accurate and up-to-date information to customers about its premium pet food brand, ADVANCE Pet Nutrition, in a consumer-friendly way.

“The ADVANCE Pet Nutrition brand is about more than just pet food,” says Neil Thorneycroft, Senior Brand Manager, ADVANCE Pet Nutrition. “We offer specialised products, including dietary supplements, which are tailored to meet the needs of pets in different age groups. To help customers understand the benefits of each product, we expect everyone who stocks it to provide advice to pet owners on the health and wellbeing of their pets.”

“The kiosk is helping us build brand loyalty, which is converting into sales. It is now a vital component of our retail marketing strategy.”

– Neil Thorneycroft, Senior Brand Manager, ADVANCE Pet Nutrition.

While professionals in veterinary practices were properly trained to recommend the most suitable product for owners’ pets, Mars Petcare also wanted to equip pet stores with a tool that could withstand any possible turnover of trained staff and to help educate the customers about its range of ADVANCE Pet Nutrition products, with the same knowledge and credibility as professional animal carers at any given time.

ADVANCE Pet Nutrition is a premium brand. However, it was not marketed that way in store and was often mixed in with low-end pet brands. It needed to be displayed in such a way that gave it an identity as a premium product.

“If the brand solves customers’ problems, then it builds loyalty, credibility and trust in ADVANCE Pet Nutrition.,” says Thorneycroft. “But we needed a way to impart this knowledge.”

Giving good advice with IBM AnyPlace Kiosk

In 2006, Mars Petcare chose IBM Business Partner† Yeahpoint, which builds and implements retail multimedia solutions, from a field of four suppliers.

“We looked to Yeahpoint to give us a solution that was creative and easy to use,” says Thorneycroft.

Mars Petcare approached Yeahpoint for advice on how to install kiosks in pet stores. The IBM Business Partner† began by using separate components such as an embedded PC, open frame LCD touch screen and speakers from different vendors. However, this solution proved difficult to implement. There were the high costs of integrating different hardware components, poor availability of parts and the need to deal with different suppliers. Not helping the matter, spare parts had to be imported from overseas and it was hard to find the right quality of speaker.

Yeahpoint believed there was a better way of creating a kiosk for Mars Petcare. In mid-2007, it developed a customised system using IBM’s AnyPlace Kiosk. The kiosk comprises a multimedia, flat-panel touch screen which provides pet owners with a wealth of information on pet care. “The kiosk itself is highly durable and can withstand the wear and tear of retail environments,” says Thorneycroft.

Yeahpoint coordinated the site preparation and installation of 95 kiosks in stores across Australia and New Zealand. The kiosk shelving and stands were designed and built by point-of-purchase specialists, the Fifth P. The roll-out began in March 2008 and was completed in early 2009. Once each kiosk was installed, Yeahpoint also conducted user training for staff.

Each kiosk contains over 1,500 printable screen pages on pet care including more than 150 dog profiles and 40 cat profiles. Customers can find out what product is best suited to their pet's needs by answering questions on the AnyPlace Kiosk's touch screen. The kiosk asks questions such as what breed the pet is, what it weighs and how much exercise it receives. It recommends products based on customer's answers. It provides information and advice about animal nutrition, diseases and behaviour. Each article can be printed out in-store or emailed to customers.

Each kiosk is managed remotely for Mars by Yeahpoint from its Australian headquarters in Sydney. The company plans to use IBM Remote Management Agent for this task in the near future.

"The common control point helps lower the total cost of ownership," says Thorneycroft. "We don't have to pay for IT staff to travel to each site to upgrade and manage the kiosks."

Improved product awareness and sales

With the AnyPlace Kiosk, Mars Petcare provides customers with instant, accurate and up-to-date information about pet products in an engaging way.

"The kiosk asks questions about customers' pets and provides advice based on the response, including the best product to buy and nutritional information," says Victorino Juan, Self Service Kiosk Sales Specialist, IBM.

Without having to train individual staff members about each product range comprehensively, pet store owners can now refer customers to the kiosk for information and advice about pet care and the ADVANCE Pet Nutrition product range.

"Instead of having dedicated staff to inform customers about our products, we have these kiosks providing important information and advice for both customers and staff," says Thorneycroft. "Its touch screen makes finding what you need to know a snap."

The kiosk also saves on training costs. Staff can use the kiosk to gain the information they need to know about products through a multimedia, interactive experience – a combination of text, video and audio.

"We used to spend a fair amount a year sending product trainers to retail outlets, but the kiosks have removed this expense," says Thorneycroft.

"Each store can use the kiosk to conduct its own consumer intelligence reporting," says Matt Cudworth, Chief Technology Officer, Yeahpoint. "Staff can track and record types of pets being researched by customers. Based on that information, each store can stock the right type of products to meet customers' needs and boost sales."

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For more information

To learn more about IBM AnyPlace Kiosk solutions contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner. Alternatively visit us at:

ibm.com/products/retail/au

For more information on Mars Petcare, please visit: www.marspetcare.com

For more information on Yeahpoint, please visit: www.yeahpoint.com



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