



Customers demand ordering kiosks

By [Juan Perez](#)

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Juan Perez is president chief technology officer of kiosk software developer [ADUSA, Inc.](#)

The trend of changing from traditional ordering to self-service creates healthy debate, but also misconceptions. In the case of self-ordering, critics make believe that kiosks somehow detract from the customer experience.

A Chicago Sun-Times columnist writing about a deli self-ordering kiosk at his local supermarket called it "another step towards our dehumanized future." When asked about using self-ordering to help alleviate the long lunch lines in his restaurants, the CEO of a growing sandwich chain said he wanted the long lines, because having customers waiting in long lines was a part of the restaurant's culture. He said they can usually listen to a local musician strumming a guitar while they wait.

Both perspectives ignored the fact that a growing number of their customers are more concerned with convenience than with ambiance or old-fashioned retail charm.

Convenience is what self-service is all about. And, yes, you can have self-ordering in your supermarket or restaurant and still maintain a traditional ordering process for those customers who prefer it. Self-ordering and traditional ordering can co-exist. They complement each other well.

Implementing self-ordering at the supermarket deli or in the restaurant will free up resources to dedicate more time to customers using the traditional ordering method. Order accuracy, which naturally improves for self-ordering customers, now also has a chance to improve for traditional-ordering customers. Order size, which has been proven to increase for self-ordering customers, now also has a chance to increase for traditional-ordering customers. Lines are shorter and wait times are reduced. Both kinds of customers are served better. Order accuracy is improved. Retailers really can't afford not to try out self-ordering in their stores.

In his column, the Sun Times columnist reminisced about when he was a boy and the butcher would give him a slice of bologna while preparing his mother's deli order. He laments that self-ordering makes that sort of old-fashioned retail experience extinct. But he also says the self-ordering process is "efficient as heck," and that it would be a lifesaver on a busy Saturday afternoon. He would also do well to ask a busy customer which they would value more: a few seconds of social interaction with the stranger behind the deli counter, or shaving off 10-15 minutes from their shopping trip.

Consumerism moves forward. There is no going back to the days of free baloney. Self-service gives the customer control and a growing number of customers, having tried it, will have it no other way.

Self-ordering will most likely become available in every supermarket deli and restaurant on the planet because customers will demand it. Many retailers recognize this trend and are working to integrate self-ordering into their stores and restaurants. As for the others: it's never too late to give the customers what they want.