

istop forges ahead North & South

This bulletin highlights how istop is now working successfully with local authorities in the North East and now in Bedfordshire to bring information and job opportunities to local communities

The easy new way to provide community information

From school admissions to housing benefits, recycling to emergency planning, the range of information that local and national government has to convey and make readily available to the public is vast.

Websites are now the cost - effective, practical and popular way to achieve this. However, with 40% of the population lacking Internet access at home, a substantial proportion of residents cannot easily view this information online.



Sedgefield and Alnwick District Councils have found a new solution that is proving to work well, giving residents access to this information within their villages without having to travel to the Council offices or phone for leaflets.

The answer is istop touch screen terminals. These Councils have been working with istop to provide access to this information through istop kiosks in local stores in the area.

Sedgefield, for instance, provides information about housing - council housing, garages, benefits; about education - admission criteria, free school meals and adult education; health, policing, recycling and emergency planning.

The kiosks are sited in shops ranging from post offices and cafes to village general stores, bringing valuable extra customer traffic to these local businesses. Shopkeepers right across the area have also been seeing benefits from them.

The istop kiosk was installed at Broom Mini Market, Ferryhill, Co Durham over a year ago. Janet Herron, the owner of the premises, feels that the kiosk has been a benefit to her business. She says, *"It has increased footfall and the 'locals' that did not use the shop have started to visit to use the Jobcentre Plus facility"*.

Over the last few months, due to the economic situation, Janet has noticed many more customers coming in to use the istop kiosk, which has resulted in people finding employment.

Situated in the area is a council-run juvenile centre and youngsters from the age of 16 to 18 years old have started to look for work through the kiosk.

Vince Robinson, Former North-East Director of the Department of Employment and Jobcentre Plus, says *"istop kiosks seem to me to be an excellent collaborative project. They will bring the services and benefits of both central and local government as well as some well-known retailers directly to the heart of some of our more outlying areas, as well as to inner cities and nearby towns and villages which are presently poorly served."*

What are istop kiosks?

- istop is a stand-alone touchscreen information and shopping kiosk
- It offers a solution to social and digital exclusion by allowing people of all ages in rural and urban areas to have equal access to online services as the rest of the population
- Kiosks are sited in local shops and other community facilities
- istop kiosks help local and national government by providing local communities with free, self-service information and advice about health, housing, education, family, employment and benefit services. They also provide communities with extra shopping choice (healthcare, toys, gifts) and independent retailers with additional income
- The concept has the backing and involvement of Jobcentre Plus, National Federation of SubPostmasters and the Rural Shops Alliance

Want to know more about istop?

see www.istopkiosks.co.uk
or call now on 0800 008 6727

Kiosks play vital role in North East villages

Many thousands of people in local communities throughout the North East from Sedgefield and Yarm up to Alnwick and Morpeth have embraced the introduction of their local istop kiosks and now treat them as vital local facilities within the area.

Since the introduction of the 70 kiosks last year, thousands of job applications have been submitted as a result, and many people have been successful in finding work through this innovation. This has even been at a time when job hunting is more difficult than ever and, for many people, Jobcentre Plus offices less accessible.

A good example is Wendy, 44, who had been looking for work since May 2008. She does not drive, so any job she could consider would be dependent on local bus services.

She was visiting her local Jobcentre twice a week at a cost of £4 per visit. Wendy had seen the istop kiosk in the Post Office. She says:

“Upon using it, I realised that it was the same as the Jobcentre kiosk ... but the Post Office was only five minutes walk away for me.”

She visited the kiosk everyday until she found a vacancy that matched her needs. She attended the job interview and was offered the position, all within two weeks of first using the istop kiosk.

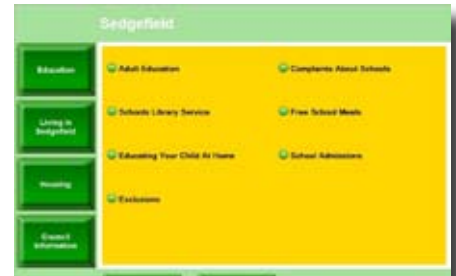
At the start of September 2008 Wendy joined Safe Hands in Northumberland as a care assistant.

Jackie Derrick, Operational Manager for Jobcentre Plus, Northumberland, commented.

“I believe these kiosks are a great way for those individuals who may live further from one of our offices to find out about the jobs available for them.”

The level of usage has built steadily so that, when relating the number of users to the cost, it is already costing an average of just £1 per job seeker per month to help the unemployed in some remote villages, many of them in Sedgefield and Alnwick District Council areas.

And that is a cost that continues to fall as the number of users increases, because the cost of each kiosk per month is fixed. The more they are used, the cost per user continues to fall below £1.



Jonathan Savitt, managing director of istop commented:

“With the close support of the local district councils and Jobcentre Plus in the North East, istop has helped hundreds of people in the area to acquire local service and job opportunity information. We’re delighted that many have benefited from local access and would be pleased to work with more central and local government teams nationwide to show they what a valuable and flexible information service this can be, whether it is for jobs, education, health or local amenities.”



Central Bedfordshire and istop help local job hunters

Job hunters in Luton and several smaller Bedfordshire communities can now check on the latest work available just by visiting their local post office, cafe or supermarket...

The new Central Bedfordshire Council has joined with technology innovators istop to initially install istop touch screen kiosks in eleven local stores to help the local community. These terminals, which are free to use, can provide access to local community information and details of the latest jobs available via Jobcentre Plus. Users can also buy from a wide range of products available.

The kiosks offer many potential benefits not only to residents but also retailers. In addition to bringing important local information to the heart of the community, they make it much easier to access job information locally at a time when many people who do not have internet access have to travel longer distances to Jobcentre Plus offices.

Hannah Richards, Head of Customer Services at Central Bedfordshire Council, explained the Council's decision to test the kiosks when she commented; *"As a new authority, Central Bedfordshire aspires to show how local government can be better, closer to the people it serves, and can deliver better local services.*

"We are positive that istop kiosks have huge potential in reaching out to, informing and supporting citizens. They could be especially valuable for those people who are most vulnerable, who often do not have access to the internet.

The double attraction is that, at the same time, we can support local retailers through the value that hosting kiosks can add to their business. We are therefore currently providing funding to pilot the installation of istop kiosks in retail outlets and other community facilities throughout the district."

The kiosks have proved an instant success. Jane Markham, Head of Community Empowerment at the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, commented on local reaction to the first kiosk in the area which was installed as a test at the village store in Ridgmont near Ampthill at the turn of the year.

"The kiosk is proving to be a real asset and lots of people are coming in to use the job search facility in particular. They are really pleased with it."

Since April 2009 the new Central Bedfordshire Council has been delivering all the existing services of both Mid and South Bedfordshire District Councils as well as those previously run by Bedfordshire County Council in these areas.

The Council is one of the first in the country to capitalise on the potential of the istop kiosks. This follows their successful introduction last year in several areas of the North East of England where 70 kiosks are now well-established as popular local facilities.



Customers find jobs through istop

28 year-old Gary lost his job with Cramlington Roofing and was claiming unemployment benefit. He visited the local Jobcentre only once and when he returned he visited his local Post Office and ended up discussing his experience with the staff there. They demonstrated the istop kiosk located in their store.

"I found it very useful as the jobs advertised were all very local."

Gary used the istop kiosk three to four times each week applying for several jobs advertised via the Jobpoint pages on the kiosk. He soon found employment with Border Laird, which is about nine miles away from where he lives. Gary says, *"I think the kiosk is a great idea, its very easy to use and better than going to the Jobcentre."*

Linda had been using the istop kiosk for four weeks until she got a job at Dorothy Perkins in Gateshead that was advertised via Jobpoint.

"The local Jobcentre closed some time ago and the nearest is 10 miles away. I could only visit once a week due to costly bus fares and time issues. The istop kiosk is only two minutes walk away and I could visit it every day."

Jadwiga had been looking for a job for three months. She had visited her local Jobcentre regularly but, due to the travel time and costly bus fare, she could not go as often as she would have like. In addition she says,

"I found the experience a bit unpleasant."

Having visited her local Spar, the staff showed her the istop kiosk with its Jobpoint pages linked to the Jobcentre.

"I was amazed at how easy it was to use and print off the information. I visited the shop almost every day to check for jobs."

As a result of printing off a number of job vacancies on the istop, she got a job at a local post office. Jadwiga says,

"The istop kiosk is amazing... going into the Jobcentre felt degrading... it was much more pleasant to call into my local shop to find a job."

Fair online access to services for all

It is easy to assume that everyone around us can access all the services and information that we can.

The truth is different. About 4 out of 10 people do not use the Internet and do not have access to it at home, and that proportion is no longer decreasing. They are the digitally excluded.

At the same time 3 million people are, through their personal circumstances including lack of work, socially excluded. Of this group, 75 per cent do not have Internet access.

This coincides with a trend for public information and services to be delivered online. So those without internet access are increasingly marginalised, virtually excluded from the vital services which are particularly valuable to them such as details of jobs available through Jobcentre Plus and local government services. Meanwhile unemployment is rising and the distances that many of the unemployed would have to travel to an employment office are increasing.

istop touch-screen kiosks in local communities are proving to be the perfect solution to help this already large sector of society. Sited in local stores and free to use, the terminals make it easy for even those who have never worked with a computer to access this important information without travelling far. They enable people to check the availability of work frequently so they do not miss opportunities that otherwise go very quickly.

Checking the istop kiosk each day helped 21 year-old Lee from County Durham. Having been working outside the local area in Nottingham, he found himself without further work so he returned to his hometown. His family told him about the istop kiosk's Jobcentre facility now in the local shop. He started to visit the kiosk on a daily basis and this led to Lee finding full-time employment for the local company in Co Durham. Lee says,

*"The kiosk has made finding a job so much easier.
It's like having a Jobcentre just across the road"*

Jonathan Savitt, managing director of istop kiosks, said:

"We believe that kiosks are necessary to provide fair and equal access to information from all levels of Government."



Sheelagh Keyse, Director, Customer Services Directorate, Jobcentre Plus

"Jobcentre Plus is delighted to work with istop in bringing a range of information and services to customers through its network of local kiosks. By linking customers to the Jobcentre Plus Jobpoint, the kiosks provide an invaluable resource for anyone looking for work or who may need information about welfare benefits. For each week this year, our website has received an average of two million user visits and handled an average of six million job searches - providing access to this service for even more people can only be seen as a good thing."

Sheelagh Keyse, Director, Customer Services Directorate, Jobcentre Plus

Press and publicity

For enquiries about the istop In Touch bulletin or press and publicity in general:

Chris Lewis Tel
0207 736 4022
Email
chrislewis@clareville.co.uk

istop kiosks,
Colorama House,
23 Wadsworth Road,
Middlesex UB6 7JD

Want to know more about istop?
see www.istopkiosks.co.uk
or call now on 0800 008 6727