atm marketplace

Three Reasons to Use ADA Compliance Efforts to Convert ATMs to Wireless Communication

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Cutting the communication cord can free ATMs to not only meet requirements but also take advantage of prime traffic locations.

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D riven by the need for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations, independent ATM deployers (IADs) have an opportunity to reduce costs and improve profitability by implementing machine-to-machine (M2M) wireless communications technology.

M2M communications brings to ATM deployers the connectedness of the smartphone revolution that is changing the way businesses communicate both internally and with customers. Wireless M2M applications within the ATM market are reaching a new level of maturity; there is now substantially greater recognition of the technological capabilities and the potential benefits of connecting devices to the wireless networks than there was even two years ago. This represents a whole new generation of technology innovation and a significant wave of growth possibilities.

For many IADs, the adoption of wireless M2M technology can be offset by the requirements to comply with the ADA regulations, turning an expense situation into an opportunity for growth.

Spurred by requirements of sponsoring banks or processors, many IADs are documenting their ADA compliance with inspections of each machine in a portfolio.

The cost of the ADA compliance process could be offset by converting ATMs from a dial-up or wired Internet connection to wireless communication with modems that use the existing cell-phone infrastructure.

Experts recommend that IADs take photos and measurements to prove they have made efforts to meet ADA requirements, such as accessible placement, voice guidance, Braille signage and input controls for visually-impaired individuals.

Unfortunately, not all IADs will take the requirements seriously, said ADA compliance expert Sam M. Ditzion, CEO of Boston-based consultancy firm Tremont Capital Group.

"It will catch up with a lot of IADs and it will be too late at the time they should have done something because it may take six months or a year to get it done and they will have exposure during that time," he said.

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One of the barriers to compliance for ADA is the requirement of visiting, inspecting, upgrading and documenting each ATM in a portfolio. However, the cost of that process could be offset by converting ATMs from a dial-up or wired Internet connection to wireless communication with modems that use the existing cellphone infrastructure. Each visit for ATM inspection also could be used to upgrade to wireless communication.

Over the past two to three years, the deployment of wireless solutions by ATM IADs have outpaced all other connectivity options combined, such as telephone lines and ethernet. The cost savings, flexibility and increased security make wireless solutions the new standard for ATM connectivity.

As IADs assess their portfolios for ADA compliance, the process could also be used to convert to wireless communications for long-term return on investment, according to Chris Baird, general manager of OptConnect, a Kaysville, Utah-based provider of wireless connectivity solutions for ATMs.

ADA requirements

To be in compliance, IADs need to consider:
- Accessible placement
- Voice guidance
- Braille signage
- Input controls for the visually impaired

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"The cost of ADA compliance could almost be entirely offset by switching to wireless," Baird said.

At one time, wireless connectivity was reserved for mobile or temporary ATM installations, such as at sporting events and festivals. But that's no longer the case. Wireless has matured into a cost-effective option for long-term installations.

Benefit No. 1: Reduced costs

Wireless connectivity options for ATMs typically cost significantly less than dial-up and wired Internet connections to install, operate and maintain. Depending on the business model of the wireless provider, the modem may come at no cost with a monthly connection fee, or the IAD may purchase the modem with a lower monthly fee in comparison.

Either method represents savings over the traditional landline dial-up connection. Industry experts estimate the average landline costs $42 per month. In contrast, the most common OptConnect offering runs only $19.99 per month. One large portfolio that switched from landlines to wireless is saving more than $80,000 per year.

For OptConnect's wireless modems, installation is typically plug and play, so the ATM does not have to be out of service

for long. On the other hand, a typical telephone company service call may take several days and cost up to $150 to activate a phone line.

Benefit No. 2: Location flexibility

By cutting the communication cord, an IAD can reduce the degree of difficulty in meeting certain ADA requirements. If an ATM must be relocated to meet ADA accessibility requirements, the new position may not be convenient for the communication connection. Rather than calling a technician to relocate the wire drop, an IAD can convert to wireless connectivity and save on the cost and time it takes to relocate the ATM. Wireless connectivity gives the opportunity for flexible replacement options to minimize downtimes.

Flexibility in location also can result in improved transaction volumes. Industry research has shown that a prime location for an ATM can result in much greater traffic and interchange. However, that prime location may be in the middle of heavy traffic in a convenience store. Sometimes the best spot for an ATM is not the best spot for a phone line or a communication source, unless it's wireless.

Assessment of ATMs for ADA compliance also can be an opportune time to review placement of ATMs for traffic. In some cases, a new ATM may be required if the existing unit can't be upgraded to meet requirements. It's a good opportunity to re-evaluate and assess where the best possible placement of that ATM is to take advantage of foot traffic.

If an ATM must be relocated to meet ADA accessibility requirements, the new position may not be convenient for the communication connection. Wireless offers a solution.

One consideration in choosing a wireless provider is the coverage footprint of the wireless carriers. Nationwide coverage is available for ATMs using GSM and CDMA standards through national and regional carriers. The wireless connectivity vendor will supply the proper equipment to suit the cell carrier network. That means ATMs can be deployed quickly almost anywhere in the country where cellular service is available.

Benefit No. 3: Increased security

With the ongoing emphasis on ATM security, wireless connectivity offers benefits that allow IADs to meet current requirements as well those that are in store for the future.

M2M technology brings a number of added security benefits, including isolation of wireless devices from the public Internet and logical splitting of customers' devices from other network traffic, which serve as additional layers of security.

When choosing a wireless provider, make sure they are in full compliance with security standards. Wireless offerings from OptConnect, for example, are not only Payment Card Industry (PCI) and Triple Data Encryption Standard (TDES) compliant but also use the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption protocol for additional protection. SSL is the common security method used by many large online retailers to protect payment card transactions. For IADs using wireless modems equipped with SSL, the potential for a costly security breach via the wireless connection is extremely minimal. In addition, OptConnect's units comply with the Payment Application Data Security Standard (PA DSS) to ensure compliance with future PCI standards.

M2M technology also can utilize a cloud-based virtual infrastructure, a cost-effective, distributed, scalable and redundant platform that provides additional savings and security to IADs deploying OptConnect devices on their ATMs. A cloud-based interface offers greater security and redundancy compared to traditional VPNs and gateways hosted by physical infrastructure. By running multiple M2M VPN/VPN gateways, geographically distributed throughout the country, single points of failure are eliminated, allowing the ATM to have the highest uptime available. With the introduction of Smart Systems, traffic is automatically routed around any problems or network outages that might affect other ATMs with only a single gateway or end-point.

Internet access offers device interaction, often with no human intervention at all, as well as network-based services, such as status monitoring, device usage tracking and Remote Management Software capabilities.

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With the ongoing emphasis on ATM security, wireless M2M connections offer benefits that help protect IADs against current and future threats better than previous solutions. These new services are based upon the coming together of wireless infrastructure, better networks, embedded device computing, end-point control and live network feedback.

Converting to wireless connectivity can help an IAD offset the cost of ADA compliance and position a portfolio for profitability in the coming years. Cost-effective, flexible and secure wireless communication can help an IAD future-proof a portfolio.

About the sponsor: OptConnect, a Grant Victor company based in Kaysville, Utah, is a leading provider of wireless connectivity solutions for ATMs throughout North America. OptConnect furnishes fast, secure wireless connectivity for ATMs, boosting cost savings, reliability and simplicity for customers. For more information, visit www.optconnect.com.