

Convenience stores turn to loyalty, technology to bring customers in from the pump.

By Jennifer Korolishin

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The following is an excerpt from the above titled article.

A Little Bird Told Me to Come Inside

Beyond loyalty applications, technology is used in other ways to lure gasoline customers into the convenience store.

Advertising at the pump mostly consists of pump toppers and signage. But, one company offers retailers a chance to speak directly to customers at the pump via talking gas nozzles.

The Fueling Talker, from Midland, Michigan-based **DirectCast Network LLC** is a voice communication device that attaches to fuel pump nozzles.

Each battery-operated Fueling Talker contains a digital microprocessor; the tilting motion of inserting the nozzle into the tank activates a two-minute audio program. Each unit also features volume controls and alternate language capability.

The audio program contains six 15-second spots, the first and last of which are messages from the retailer, usually promoting in-store specials.

The other messages include trivia and commercials from advertisers solicited by DirectCast Network. Because each unit has an individual chip containing the audio program, store operators can tailor the messages; the same message can run on every unit in an entire chain, or each store can use a different message.

It's a turn-key program for store operators — DirectCast changes each unit's batteries and audio message monthly, as well as producing and recording the audio programs.

"The thing that makes our system so effective for advertisers and convenience stores is that it's a passive system," says Stacy Pastein, vice president of business development for DirectCast Network. "The customer doesn't have to do anything. With pump toppers, signs and video on the pumps, customers have to look at the display in order to get the message.

That's not the case with our product. The Fueling Talker is right there in their hand, and they hear the message whether they're really paying attention or not. We make a direct, uninterrupted connection with the consumer."

DirectCast Network tested its Fueling Talkers in several domestic markets, and in the United Kingdom, and found that in-store product sales rose between 15 and 400 percent where the Talkers were in use.

Many test stores reported that customers came inside to ask about products advertised on the Fueling Talkers. The company is planning a nationwide rollout later this year.