



BLACK BOX[®]

NETWORK SERVICES

Industry: Restaurant Automation

HyperActive Technologies

Project: Structured cabling and system configuration

Major Challenge: Scheduling flexibility for client sites

The background

HyperActive Technologies[®], a Pittsburgh-based intelligent robotics software company, needed a reliable partner to install its vision-based, predictive kitchen management system at a number of quick-serve restaurants across the U.S.

This system, named HyperActive Bob, is designed to reduce both customer wait times and food waste. It does this by using outside cameras to monitor the flow of customers entering the restaurant lot and by analyzing point-of-sale (POS) data from registers. Essentially, HyperActive Bob becomes the kitchen manager, making food preparation decisions to ensure that customers receive their orders quickly and that prepared food doesn't go to waste.

Ordering a partner—supersized

Initially, HyperActive Technologies handled its own installations. But as its client list grew, it turned to subcontracted installers for help. According to Project Manager Ken McCall, the vendors chosen "didn't work out very well." Many fell prey to pitfalls such as not shipping the correct type of cable to the restaurant, not reading the system manual completely, or leaving before the job was entirely finished. Others weren't able to adapt to the unique challenges of each site and interact professionally with staff at client restaurants.

So HyperActive Technologies went looking for a partner with infrastructure expertise—and more. "It's just not pulling CAT5 from point-of-sale register to point-of-sale register," McCall explains. The partner also had to have the PC skills to set up a completely integrated PoS system, as well as a geographic footprint large enough to handle all the work around the U.S. And because most installations had to be done during business hours, the installer had to be able to interact well with kitchen staff at the client sites.

In the summer of 2006, HyperActive Technologies liked what it saw in Black Box and selected us as its partner. "Black Box's reputation, being what it is, made the decision a no-brainer," McCall says.

"We chose Black Box as an installation vendor for our product based on their reputation and national footprint. So far, the quality of the work and the overall vendor relationship has met or exceeded my expectations."

Ken McCall, Project Manager, HyperActive Technologies



Black Box technicians not only needed cabling and PC expertise to install the innovative kitchen management system, they also had to work alongside busy staff in very tight spaces.

Getting it to go.

So far, Black Box has completed nearly a dozen installations, all pilot projects featuring brand-new HyperActive Bob systems in existing restaurants. Work has involved installing outdoor bullet cameras and cabling, including RG-6 coax and low-power wiring to cameras with weatherproofed connectors; VGA and serial cable for the control center console touch screens and monitors in the food preparation area; and CAT5 cable to link the system's PC to a LAN.

As promised, the work has entailed more than pulling wire and installing cameras. Black Box had to manufacture custom camera cable and fittings for the stringent outdoor applications. And using HyperActive Technologies' proprietary software, Black Box also configures the entire system, setting up and naming camera feeds for restaurant lot entrances, defining fields of interest for monitoring, and establishing vectors to capture when vehicles enter and exit the lot.

Black Box technicians are also responsible for installing the control centers. But because the mounting surface varies from site to site (it can be stainless steel, drywall, or cement block), hanging the consoles has been a particular challenge. McCall explains, "You have to be part carpenter as well."

Assessing the overall quality of Black Box's work, McCall says, "it's been exceptional." He has been impressed with the reliability, punctuality, and professional attire of the technicians, as well as their flexibility at working on short notice and accommodating last-minute scheduling changes.

And although Black Box is slated to perform ongoing maintenance, so far, it hasn't been required. "The nice thing is, we haven't really needed any because the work has been stellar," McCall says.

The good working relationship between Black Box and HyperActive Technologies has laid the groundwork for other collaborations as well, including an R&D project involving beta testing of a new system.