Smart payments in the Park using electronic money: Aiming to improve visitor satisfaction

Introduction

Universal Studios Japan® is one of the five Universal Studios theme parks all over the world. The Park has been providing world-class entertainment services since it was launched in 2001. It introduced “Wonder Money,” electronic money for exclusive use in the Park, on March 31, 2013, to improve visitor satisfaction.

Challenges

Improve the level of convenience in the Park, and create an environment where visitors can focus on experiencing the attractions.

Universal Studios Japan has received many visitors since its opening in 2001. The number of visitors in 2012 increased by about 1 million year-on-year, and the Park boasts consistent popularity as one of the best super-sized theme parks. Hiromitsu Sumioka of USJ Co., Ltd. (“USJ”) believes that “it is important to offer the most convenient experience possible in the Park in order to provide a space where everyone can truly enjoy themselves.”

One particular aspect that attracted the attention of USJ was the need to find a simplified and more convenient payment solution at restaurants and shops. Mr. Sumioka observes that “By removing cumbersome procedures and providing an environment where visitors can focus on the attractions in the Park, we believe we can create a more satisfying experience for more visitors and encourage them to visit again.”

Against such a backdrop, the company focused on introducing “electronic money for exclusive use in the Park.”

Mr. Sumioka explains that “Use of the Park’s restaurants and shops tends to focus around the late afternoon onward, when visitors are on their way home. If we reduce payment time by using electronic money, congestion will be reduced, as will visitor stress levels.” The introduction of electronic money will also benefit the company itself.

Results

Electronic money will bring down congestion at cash registers, as well as reducing visitor stress levels. Improved turnover will also lead to more purchase opportunities, and the amount of money spent in the Park is expected to increase.

This will provide a platform to retrieve data such as purchase history, enabling the planned implementation of coupon offers and a variety of content distribution services.

Future plans involve creating an environment where visitors can enjoy everything in the Park using a single smartphone.
As Mr. Sumioka notes, “If we create a mechanism in the future to harness information such as purchase history, we will be able to provide more accurate suggestions for each customer.”

**Results**

Reduction in waiting time is expected to increase the amount of money spent and encourage repeat visits

Mr. Sumioka observes that “This may be the first case where park-exclusive prepaid electronic money using smartphones has been introduced to a theme park.”

According to Mr. Sumioka, “Reduced waiting time leads to more purchasing opportunities.” It is estimated that the money spent on purchases of goods, food and beverages in the Park will increase. In addition, the number of “annual studio pass” holders and the renewal rate are also expected to rise.

**Solution**

Introducing NEC’s “Integrated Electronic Money Solution” to further improve visitor satisfaction.

On this basis, USJ decided to introduce electronic money. The company chose a prepaid electronic money for exclusive use in the Park based on NEC’s “Integrated Electronic Money Solution.” Mr. Sumioka explains the reasons as follows: “We regard electronic money not just as a means of settlement, but also as a means for visitors to enjoy themselves. We decided that NEC has both a deep understanding of our approach and the capability to achieve this.”

An important requirement was to ensure that electronic money worked in combination with the Park’s official smartphone application that has been available since 2012. The application was developed by a subsidiary of NEC, and it was determined that smooth linkage could be achieved as NEC was also participating in the project. Mr. Sumioka notes that “Additionally, implementing such a service requires a wide range of technologies, including the development of smartphone applications, payment terminals and a back-end system. We valued the fact that NEC offers a full line-up of solutions covering all of these aspects.”

Providing a comprehensive suite of services to implement the electronic money solution

Wonder Money, the electronic money solution that has been introduced in this case, consists of three main components: “Servers” that manage electronic money settlement data and transaction information, “Mobile Wallet,” a new menu on the official smartphone application, which is used by visitors to charge and spend electronic money via smartphones, and “Electronic Money Terminals” used by sales staff to settle transactions.

In order to use electronic money, the users first charge up electronic money using the “Mobile Wallet” included in the official smartphone application. Then the cashier scans the bar code displayed on the smartphone with the bar code reader connected to the “Electronic Money Terminal,” and enters the payment amount to complete the payment process. In the future, settlement terminals can be made compliant with NFC, the international standard for contactless communication, by adding contactless IC readers.

**About**

The company operates the theme park “Universal Studios Japan,” which opened in 2001. Under the four codes of conduct of “Health and Safety,” “Pursuit of Quality,” “Provision of Information” and “Entertainment,” the company strives to provide a park that is truly enjoyable for each visitor. It aims to be a leading Asian company in the entertainment and leisure industry.