

# Tampa Bay Times unveils newspaper racks that can stream video news and advertising

Video monitors will sit atop newspaper racks in select locations around Tampa Bay to stream news and information from the Tampa Bay Times.



**BOYZELL HOSEY | Times** The Tampa Bay Times has unveiled a new type of newspaper rack equipped with a 24-inch monitor that can stream news and information at select retail outlets around the bay area. TimesVision is being installed in about 50 locations. This one is located at a Kahwa in St. Petersburg

**By Mark Katches**

Have you bought a cup of coffee at Kahwa lately? If you have, you probably encountered a totally new *Tampa Bay Times* newspaper rack with a flat-screen monitor.

The 24-inch monitor streams news content and advertising in a seven-minute loop. We have the ability to update it in real-time with breaking news. It's all part of a new initiative called TimesVision designed to display video billboard content at our print distribution racks in select retail outlets.

In the newsroom, a team of journalists will be producing short, sharp videos that will play on the TimesVision monitors — interspersed with marketing spots, advertising and in-store promotions at host locations.

This technology enables the *Times* to create a news and information feed that can be sold to advertisers around the bay area.

In the past couple of weeks, we've been installing the first 53 TimesVision monitors around Tampa Bay, according to Conan Gallaty, the *Times*' executive vice president and chief digital officer.

"Our aim is to have hundreds of stores participating in the next few years throughout the Tampa Bay market," Gallaty said. "TimesVision promotes the stores that sell newspapers, so there's a great benefit to our retailers."

Billboard video advertising is not a new technology. You've seen these at gas stations and convenience stores for some time. Newsrooms in Hawaii and Virginia have experimented with the technology. We're the first newsroom in Florida to put these monitors in retail outlets. Newsroom-produced segments will focus on useful information — from daily weather reports to showcasing things to do and even quizzes that riff off the news. When major breaking news occurs, we have the capability of moving quickly to upload news alerts.

"Our goal at launch is to be able to give viewers something interesting or useful, or ideally both," said Joshua Gillin, who is leading the newsroom's efforts to create TimesVision video. The monitors are highly sophisticated. They are equipped with an optical sensor that can tell when someone walks by or faces the screen. It tracks the length of time viewers watch the videos and attempts to discern your gender and approximate age. It even tries to determine by your facial expression if you're happy, angry or indifferent. All that information can demonstrate to companies how effectively their ads are performing.

Here's what the monitors don't do. They do not take pictures or capture video that can be stored in any form. I stood in front of a test monitor inside our newsroom last week, and it pinpointed that I was a happy, adult male. When I walked away, my visit was logged and aggregated anonymously, and I was immediately forgotten. The sensors have no long-term memory. Gillin likens it to cameras on newer model cars that can detect how close you are to obstacles but aren't recording any images.

"Many of us on the project brought up several concerns and discussed them thoroughly," Gillin said. "When we actually got to see how the technology works, we no longer worried about any sort of invasive interaction, because there isn't any. Another point people should understand is that really, any use of social media or even interacting with the clerk is much more personal and intimate than having the sensor detect that you are nearby."

I swung by our local Kahwa to see how patrons interacted with the new rack positioned next to the pastries and drinks. One coffee drinker kept peering up from her laptop as she sipped her beverage. Several people did double takes. A few patrons watched the videos for extended periods as the line grew.

"This is a prime example of the *Tampa Bay Times* putting resources into trying to reach and serve its audience in innovative new ways" Gillin said. "It's demonstrating a commitment to providing information to our readers in a fashion we would have never considered even five years ago."

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