

# Cutting the Cord

CSA helps a New Orleans startup energize the design of its new kiosks that provide power for smartphones.

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By Richard Slawsky  
KioskMarketplace.com



## The players

Tampa, Florida-based CSA is a nationwide technical service provider that develops strategic partnerships with high-tech equipment manufacturers. CSA's Self-Service Solutions Division focuses on providing professional self-service solutions that lower the total cost of ownership throughout the lifecycle. Their service operations expertise and professional nationwide workforce combined with their design and manufacturing capabilities provides the most complete self-service solution in the industry.

MobileQubes, based in New Orleans, was created to solve the problem of on-the-go charging for smartphone users all over the world. The company's founders were tired of carrying around charging cords and searching for a wall outlet, or being tethered to a charging pole just to squeeze a little more juice into a phone battery. They also didn't want to buy expensive external battery packs that they would have had to remember to charge and carry around. They wanted something easy, affordable and everywhere ... so they built it. MobileQubes' self-service, fully automated kiosk gives smartphone users power where they need it — on the go and in their hands. No cords, no stopping, no problem.

**“It’s putting power back in people’s hands and people’s phones when they need it the most.”**

— Sean Carrigan, CEO of MobileQubes

## The challenge

Entrepreneur Sean Carrigan was in a New Orleans restaurant when he experienced something encountered by most of us at one time or another: His mobile phone battery was about to die. And like most of us, having a working phone was critical to his being able to stay connected throughout the workday.

After asking the restaurant staff if he could plug his phone in behind the bar, and being turned down, it occurred to Carrigan that it would be great if there were some way he could pay a few dollars and have his phone charged. And, as happens with many entrepreneurs, that moment of inconvenience triggered a light bulb in Carrigan's mind and the idea for MobileQubes was born.



Along with cofounders Jason Palmer, who serves as chief technology officer, and Mike Melito, who serves as president and COO, Carrigan as CEO of the newly formed company began developing the concept that ultimately would be the MobileQubes kiosk.

Although a number of phone-charging solutions are already on the market, the drawback of some of those solutions is that they require the user to wait by the charger for as long as it takes to replenish the battery, a process that could take 45 minutes or more. Although such solutions perform the task for which they were designed, they are not much help to airport passengers rushing from one gate to another or a convention attendee rushing to get to a meeting.

MobileQubes takes a different route to provide power for dying phones. The solution Carrigan and his partners designed was one where customers could visit a kiosk and rent Qubes: portable, cordless battery packs that plug into a cellphone for charging on the go.

“It’s mobile, it’s cord free and it brings convenience to an inconvenient situation,” Carrigan said. “It’s putting power back in people’s hands and people’s phones when they need it the most.”

But in an industry where a delay of even a few days could allow a competitor to beat them to the marketplace with a similar idea, the trio knew it was critical to develop their idea into a deployable unit as quickly as possible. Working with multiple vendors, having to perform due diligence on each one and paying markups at each stage of the process could derail their idea and leave them as an also-ran.

### The solution

The team developed a prototype unit to prove their idea would work, but they needed to lock in a technology partner to turn it into a market-ready product. At that point, they turned to CSA.

“Those guys really believed in what we were doing,” Carrigan said. “They really helped us take things from an early prototype to what we have today and what we have planned for the future.”

CSA works with companies such as MobileQubes to serve as a one-stop shop for their project needs, including design, manufacturing, logistics, installation and service. The firm can walk a deployer through the entire process: bringing an idea to fruition, manufacturing the kiosk itself, providing maintenance once the units are deployed and ultimately providing decommissioning services when those machines are at the end of their lives.



“Being able to work with one partner to handle the various stages of the process rather than through four or five different touch points helps people get to market much faster,” said Luc Vallieres, CSA’s COO.

“By partnering with CSA, we’ve been able to multiply ourselves exponentially and leverage their expertise and capabilities to make us more efficient,” Carrigan said.

“Any time you’re involved with a startup — especially one that involves hardware development from scratch, software development from scratch, developing a consumer product from scratch and dealing with everything else that’s on the customer-facing end — if you can make everything involved with that as turnkey and as streamlined as possible and do it with someone you can consider a strong partner, then the entire process is much smoother,” Carrigan said. “CSA recognizes that the more machines we can design, build and get out into the marketplace, the more business they will do with us. It makes it more of a strategic partnership than a traditional vendor relationship.”

### The results

A MobileQubes kiosk allows customers to rent or purchase a Qube to match their phone at any of the company’s kiosks, swiping their credit card to cover the daily fee. When customers are ready to return the Qube, they simply stop by any MobileQubes kiosk, click “Return” on the home screen and insert the Qube into one of the ports on top of the unit. From there, the Qube automatically is recharged for use by another customer.

Users also have the option of keeping the Qube by paying an additional fee. They then can recharge the Qube at home and carry it with them when they travel.

MobileQubes has deployed 10 kiosks to date, primarily in the New Orleans area, with an additional unit located at Hyatt McCormick Place in Chicago.

“The feedback so far is that we have a great quality product,” Carrigan said. “It’s in places where people need it most, and they are recognizing the value we are providing.”

Going forward, the company has deals in place to deploy several hundred additional units within the next few months in high-traffic venues around the country such as airports, rail systems, casinos and hotels. It also is developing a MobileQubes Lite version: a smaller unit for bars, restaurants and other places with limited space.





## About the sponsor:

*Tampa, Florida-based CSA is a nationwide service solutions outsourcing partner to hi-tech equipment manufacturers and a premier self-service solutions provider. With our self-service solutions we utilize a turnkey lifecycle model designed improve quality and reduce the total cost of ownership. As both an innovative self-service manufacturer and a proven service solutions provider we are able to provide competitive upfront pricing for every phase of the lifecycle. Our turnkey lifecycle solutions model leverages our service operations expertise and professional nationwide workforce combined with our integrated manufacturing model to provide the most complete self-service solution in the industry.*

“We piloted in New Orleans and six months later we’re rolling out nationally in large markets with key retail relationships,” Carrigan said.

“All of the progress and feedback has been very positive,” he said. “Our partnership with CSA has been key to streamlining the process. We can leverage their expertise and their knowledge, and we are better off for it.”