

New York pay phones to get touchy feely makeover

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A boy walks by empty public pay phone booths inside Grand Central Station in New York. A handful of grimy New York pay phones will be reincarnated as touch-screen pads with online access to neighborhood information.

A handful of grimy New York pay phones will be reincarnated as touch-screen pads with online access to neighborhood information, the mayor's office said Monday.

A pilot program starts next month that will see 250 phone booths

converted to house 32-inch (81 cm) screens, instead of phones, across the city.

The [gadgets](#) will be operable in several languages and aimed at [tourists](#) and residents seeking information on local restaurants, sales, or entertainment attractions, Nicholas Sbordone, a spokesman for city technology issues, said.

There will also be a direct line to the 311 number, which deals with non-emergency complaints and questions to city authorities.

For now, the experiment will see the information screens, which will not have [open web](#) browsing capability, put alongside old-fashioned pay phones in double booths.

But if the [pilot program](#) gets off the ground the change will spread through the system of 12,800 pay phones, expanding to allow ability to consult email and make Skype phone calls.

"We are in the process of assessing what we want the future pay phones to be in New York City overall, and this is one pilot," Sbordone said.

A decision on the phone of the future probably might not come until the end of 2014, he said.

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