

Facilities Management from A to Z

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V ending

The use of vending machines for the provision of everything from coffee to condoms and tea to tights provides a cost effective solution for many facility managers faced with the need to provide an ever increasing range of services to multiple sites or large workforces.

Automatic retailing has a long and chequered history with problems of inefficient equipment, poor quality products and allegations of hygiene problems and cross infection risks. However modern machines make use of new technology and can provide a high quality, hygienic and reliable service at a value for money price.

Refreshment vending solutions are particularly useful for 24 hour operations and can be placed where required which can make them much more convenient reducing time lost through workers having to go to a remote canteen or kitchen. Sinks full of dirty crockery and unhygienic refrigerators are avoided and recyclable cups are now available thus reducing waste.

Sourcing options vary and can be tailored to suit the organisation. Machines and materials can be purchased outright or provided through a variety of contract or leasing solutions. Where the FM has a catering or TFM contractor it may prove more cost effective to procure the vending through that contract to benefit from national procurement arrangements. However the service is provided, it is important to remember that the Food Hygiene Regulations set out strict requirements for the hygienic operation of food and drink machines.

Under a contract operation with a vending provider the machines are normally supplied and installed by the operator, who then maintains and services them. All ingredients and products are supplied by the operator, who fills and cleans the machine and collects and accounts for the cash takings. The prices to be charged for vended products will be decided jointly by the vending specifier and the operator, and will depend on whether the operator is to be paid entirely from the cash proceeds of sales or by means of a separate service charge.

Some operators offer “cost per cup” plans which amalgamate the capital and running costs of a beverage vending service into a single charge per cup. The cost per cup includes a lease element to cover the capital costs of the vending machine together with the service and consumable elements for the cost of ingredients, cups, cleaning and maintenance.

The Automatic Vending Association is the Trade Association for the refreshment vending industry and has a code of conduct, hygiene guidelines and other useful information on its website at www.ava-vending.co.uk