

## Vending future looks bright

[Vending machines](#) in the work environment has come a long way since the early days of delivering tea and coffee, and continues to eliminate the need for a kettle or cup. New technology and innovations, increased efficiency and reliability of machines, consumer expectations and demand have fuelled the growth of the drinks vending market over the past few years and widely extended the choice and variety of drinks options available.

According to the [Automatic Vending Association](#), there are now 518,589 refreshment vending machines in use in the UK with consumer spend totalling £1.5 billion every year through vending machines. With eight million cups of coffee and two million cups of tea vended every day in the UK, these fundamental drinks continue to be the strongest sellers in the industry.

Consumers are, however, becoming increasingly used to the bespoke, varied and customised drinks offering from the likes of Starbucks and Costa, and are therefore seeking the same 'intelligent drinking' from vending machines in their work environment. Consumers recognise that they have many options and want different drinks for different occasions, something that is putting pressure on vending operators to come up with innovative new products.

Many vending companies such as KLIX are experiencing growth in speciality drinks and variations on the traditional tea and coffee staples such as cappuccino and café latte, which offer more of a 'treat' factor for consumers.

But, much of the growth in terms of drinks vending choices falls under the health and wellbeing category. Health-conscious consumers are becoming increasingly aware of and responsive to what they put into their bodies, partly fuelled by a greater knowledge and understanding of health risks, changes in eating and drinking habits, and the rise of the 'detox' trend.

From decaf variations of tea and coffee to wellbeing versions such as green tea and peppermint tea, consumers are opting for drinks that have a functional benefit - for example, KLIX has just launched a Cranberry juice drink comprised of 10% real fruit content and packed with antioxidants and vitamin C.

These 'healthy' drinks are influencing the product development in drinks vending and have all been well received into the market with vending companies experiencing particular sales growth from tapping into the health and premiumisation trends. Schools in particular are adopting healthier drinks options in pupil vending machines as a response to the negative health impacts and awareness of fizzy, high sugar drinks, which is mirroring the mainstream consumer trends.

Most vending companies are also well aware of the rising popularity of bottled water with many vending systems now all use Brita filtered water which responds to this particular consumer demand and contributes towards providing a great quality drink. But vending operators also need to be aware that other noncarbonated drinks and 'new age' beverages are creating growth opportunities as well, including sports and energy drinks.

A further trend and common consumer preference is the ability to choose drinks from well known brands such as Nescafe or PG Tips. These trusted and popular brands are providing consumers with familiarity and the same quality they would expect to receive as if they'd made the drink themselves. A recent experiment reinforces this preference - two beverage machines were placed side by side in the same office environment, one with PG Tips branded tea and one with an unbranded alternative tea. Over a three week period, the number of PG Tips cups consumed was almost double that of the non-branded tea.

Another area of growth is in the fairtrade and sustainable drinks products in vending machines. KLIX currently offer Percol fairtrade coffee, and will be launching a Fairtrade tea in 2007, whilst its sister brand FLAVIA has a sustainable coffee and tea where they are working directly with farmers at origin to improve their working conditions and facilities. Again, consumers are wising up to these type of issues and demanding to know more about how and where the products they consume are produced. The added feel good factor of selecting a fairtrade option is an increasingly strong incentive for consumers and many vending operators are responding to this through their product development and corporate social responsibility programmes.

So what are consumers looking for from their drinks vending machines? And what are the major criteria for a positive drinks experience? Recent industry research indicates that quality and choice continually appear as the two principle criteria for consumers when rating the quality of drinks vending. From a wide range of drinks choices to refined quality and flavour, consumer standards and expectations are rising. An efficient and reliable machine with a hassle-free, convenient operation are also key to a positive drinks experience.

In terms of what the next few years and the future holds, it is predicted that coffee and tea will remain strong and continue to be key drinks choice categories. Areas of growth ahead will be in the holistic health and more premium drinks choices as consumers become more demanding and their

tastes and choices more specific. Speciality drinks will also continue to increase in popularity as consumers demand a more indulgence drinks experience, whilst further trends will develop around individualisation and convenience. Technology will also advance the market over the coming years and generate quality improvements and a subsequently wider choice of drinks.

### About the Author

[Vending machines](#) in the work environment are popular, especially [coffee vending](#) and the future looks bright in this industry.

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