

Pick n Pay rewards customers for recycling

Pick n Pay is taking another stride towards environmental sustainability by introducing 10 more Reverse Vending Machines (RVMs) in stores across Gauteng, Eastern, and Western Cape, which will soon be integrated with its Smart Shopper programme to reward customers with points for recycling.



The new Reverse Vending Machine at Pick n Pay Canal Walk. Image supplied

These RVMs, operated in collaboration with Polyco, currently incentivise customers to recycle their waste in exchange for digital cash and vouchers, driving engagement and awareness of environmental stewardship.

Pick n Pay initially piloted an RVM in 2018, and its success led to four machines becoming operational.

Ten more stores have received RVMs through the Polyco partnership, and an estimated 20 more are scheduled to be rolled out through a supplier partnership mid-year.

When customers deposit recyclable materials such as plastic, glass, and aluminium in the machines, they receive rewards in the form of cash or vouchers to spend in the Imagined Earth app with various rewards partners.

Get rewarded!

Smart Shopper points will be introduced later this year, with the machines automatically linking to the Smart Shopper Pick n Pay app for easy redemption. Any recyclable item can be disposed of in the machine, provided it has a barcode to identify the product.

The rewards are determined based on the weight and type of material deposited, with prices averaging around 10c for a PET bottle, 15c for a can, and 11c for a glass bottle. One of the most popular rewards customers choose to buy with their recycling rewards is airtime and data.

Steffen Burrows, sustainability manager at Pick n Pay, emphasises the strategic placement of the RVMs within stores, making recycling convenient and reinforcing its importance. "We really want to instil a responsible recycling culture in our customers by offering an incentive," says Burrows. "We find our customers are already motivated to reuse and recycle, but we wanted to change the culture more widely."

"We're encouraging shoppers to keep items for recycling in their cars and bring them into our stores when they shop. It's also great if you've just finished your juice box or bottle of cold drink in-store and can claim the recycling rebate straight away."

"The value assigned to each waste item rewards customers and educates them on the significance of a circular economy. Recycling generates revenue and creates much-needed jobs, and significantly reduces waste that goes to our landfill," says Burrows.

Each machine can store between 650 and 750 waste items or around 375 two-litre milk bottles. The machines monitor their capacity and automatically notify the waste management provider when they need to be emptied. The recyclable waste is manually sorted off-site, and the materials are sent to the correct recycling facilities.

"Through Polyco's Million Plus campaign, we're aiming to get millions of South Africans to join the plastic recycling movement. Only at scale can we end plastic waste and create a healthier world for everyone," says Patricia Pillay, Polyco CEO.

"The Reverse Vending Machine initiative is one of a number of collaborations with Pick n Pay to achieve this aim. We also collaborate through their Pick n Pay School Club to provide over 2.6 million learners and over 140,000 educators, across 2,600 schools, by providing Plastics Recycling educational material, infrastructure and awareness to instill recycling behaviour at a young age."

The introduction of additional RVMs underscores Pick n Pay's commitment to environmental responsibility and invites customers to actively participate in promoting a circular economy. "As these machines become fixtures in our stores, we hope they serve as reminders of the collective effort needed to preserve the planet. These will make recycling more accessible and rewarding for our customers," concludes Burrows.

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