

## **Vending Machines – A Controlled, Safe Method to Provide Food and Beverages to Consumers**

### *Part I - Why Vending is the Ultimate Controlled Dispensing Solution for the Convenience Services Industry?*

As organizations modify their operations and procedures to best keep employees and customers safe in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that is sweeping across our nation and the world, the need to safely provide food and beverage options remains critical.

According to the National Merchandising Association (NAMA), “Through our unique food distribution system, our industry can be the greatest source of “contactless” nourishment to over 40 million consumers with food and beverages daily, and it is all accomplished in an unattended retail environment, often with round the clock availability.”

Federal and State governments, along with the CDC, are encouraging social distancing, including reducing or eliminating face-to-face encounters with alternative options such as contactless delivery and self-serve options. In workplaces, this includes re-evaluating how food and beverages are offered to employees. For example, in the past weeks, many organizations have shuttered cafeterias to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Recently the NIH and CDC released information on the Coronavirus’ lifespan on surfaces.

- Airborne: 30 minutes to 3 hours
- Cardboard: 24 hours
- Stainless Steel: 2 days
- Plastic: 3 days

These guidelines have prompted many organizations to further re-evaluate self-serve convenience service options deployed in their organizations such as unattended retail markets. The risks in these applications is that the food and beverage products are not controlled in such that consumers can pick-up products and return them to the shelves for the next consumer to handle. With COVID-19 having up to a three-day lifespan on items such as bottled beverages and clamshell salad containers, unattended retail applications may pose a risk of being a spreading point within organizations.

Unlike unattended retail markets where consumers can access and return the food and beverage products, vending requires consumers to purchase the product(s) before the consumer is able to touch the product(s). Just think in a micro market setting how many people before you may have picked up that plastic bottled beverage or salad in a plastic clamshell before you and put it back on the shelf.

Besides the product itself having the opportunity to be handled by multiple people in a micro market application, another consideration is the cleanliness of micro market hardware itself. For

example, when consumers access products in micro markets they often come in contact with shelving holding the product. You have risk of direct exposure on the shelf itself, as well as transfer exposure from the product. Being full secured access, this is not a concern or risk when it comes to vending, as only the operator has access to the interior of the machine including the shelving.

Vending offers the ultimate secured access solution and allows organizations to safely provide employees and consumers with food and beverage products, with little to no risk of contamination from numerous other individuals handling the product.

According to the European Vending Association, “Vending machines are a reliable and safe way to obtain food and beverages. Vending machine operators place food safety as top priority in their daily service and are trained in protection against infections. During the current health crisis, operators have also put in place measures to ensure that the disinfection of machine surfaces is also carried out as regularly as possible.”

For more information or other equipment questions, please contact Federal Machine at 1-800-247-2446.

*What products are recommended to safely clean and disinfect vending equipment? Check back soon to find out in Part II.*