

Self-Serve ‘Micromarts’ Fill a Food Service Niche

Compact kiosks offer fresh foods, replace vending in workplaces

You can be replaced by a machine,” bosses used to tell disgruntled employees. Now even the machines – at least vending machines – can be replaced in offices and other workplaces where vending is an inadequate answer and a full service café is too big and expensive.

In the middle ground, a new concept, the self-service micromarket, provides the kind of fresh, prepackaged meals and beverages commonly found in a café’s grab-and-go display, but needs no attendant, only someone to restock it from a commissary, just like a bank of vending machines.

The concept has been embraced enthusiastically by the vending industry, according to *Vending Times*, the industry’s magazine. Faced by declining revenue in traditional vending, “early adopters, impressed with the results, are deploying them in larger numbers,” *VT* reports.

‘Honor Box on Steroids’

A micromarket is a convenience store without a cashier, according to Jim Brinton, president of Evergreen Vending, Tukwila, WA, who has opened 90 micro-markets over the past two years.

“It’s like an honor box on steroids,” he says. “Customers check themselves out and have hundreds of product options.” He was speaking at the Atlantic Coast Exposition, a vending industry conference.

Currently, there are about 700 micromarkets installed nationwide, Brinton estimates. He expects the number to increase to 7,000 by 2014, ultimately growing to about 50,000.

A new micromarket “was able to make eating healthy convenient” for the 250 employees at National Gypsum Company’s headquarters, Charlotte, NC, says Don Parris, a security contractor to the company, writing in *FMJ*, magazine of the International Facility Management Assn.

A micromarket is easy to install. It’s considered ideal in a workplace or other site where the public doesn’t have access.

The market consists of refrigerated, glass-front display cases like those in a supermarket and shelves for non-refrigerated products. It can hold 300 or more different items, like a standard c-store.

Sales Double, Vendors Claim

In place of a cashier, there’s a self-checkout touchscreen kiosk that accepts all forms of payment, from debit cards to cash. A surveillance camera discourages pilferage. Brinton and other vendors claim the markets have increased sales from two to six times the vending banks they replaced.

Four companies provide micromarkets, listed in *VT*:

- 365 Retail Markets, 365retailmarkets.com
- Avanti Markets, avantimarkets.com
- Breakroom Provisions, breakroomprovisions.com
- Microtronic US, microtronicus.com

All work through local vendors. Some food service contractors also offer micromarkets.

Clarion can help you find the solution that works best at your location. Contact Tom Mac Dermott, 603/642-8011, Angela Phelan, 973/544-6223, or Ernie Wilder, 703/282-3030, or e-mail us at info@clariongp.com.

