

Mobility Plaza®

Placing sustainability at the heart of c-stores

Today's convenience store industry shows great examples of businesses implementing effective sustainability measures. We look into some of the most interesting examples around the world of tackling food waste, reducing plastic packaging, and how to use a holistic way to build the most sustainable c-store.



Service stations and convenience stores have implemented measures around energy efficiency, water usage, fuels and EV charging in an effort to cut costs, reduce their carbon footprint and ensure a role in the future of mobility. Inside convenience stores, the number of sustainability initiatives has mushroomed over the last couple of years. So much so that there are now c-stores placing sustainability at the heart of their operations.

Customers want to consume in a more sustainable way – they are far more aware of their own carbon footprint and want retailers to offer them greener choices. From food waste to plastic packaging, customers want to take action while shopping. In 2022, 64% of UK adults limited the use of single-use plastic while 48% bought more locally produced goods, [according to Deloitte](#). Brands like Reitan Convenience Sweden are acting on these established trends.

In 2021, Reitan Convenience Sweden launched PBX in Stockholm, a format that looked to become “the world’s most sustainable convenience store.” Reitan wanted to create a “living lab” that challenged and inspired customers, retailers and suppliers from a sustainability perspective.

“The sustainability and nutritional value of each product, down to the ingredient level, were evaluated in relation to the planetary boundaries. The content, origin, packaging materials, and other aspects of the products are assessed in a holistic way to find the best products in every category,” explains

Linnea Borgström, HR & Sustainability Director at Reitan Convenience Sweden.

A big focus of the evaluation was on risk commodities such as palm oil, coffee, cocoa, soy, tobacco, animal protein and pesticide-treated fruit, which often have a far larger environmental footprint than other categories.

“We need to make sustainability convenient enough for the customer to make the better choice for people and the planet. PBX is a very strong format and platform for us to test new products before they can be moved over to Pressbyrå or 7-Eleven and a way for us to implement our ambitious sustainability strategy,” adds Borgström.

The store looks to challenge the traditional idea of a convenience store. To achieve that it has even dropped key categories such as tobacco. PBX is part of a new wave of convenience stores that have stopped selling cigarettes as they bet on sustainability and health. Leading Swiss retailer Migrolino also falls into this category with their new, health-focused *gooods* c-store format.



Tackling food waste

With a growing number of service stations and convenience stores offering prepared food as well as fresh fruit and veg, food waste has become a new-found problem. More than one third of the food produced in the world for human consumption every year gets lost or wasted, approximately 2.5 billion tons, according to WWF.

Retailers are looking to take action as showcased by the growing number of partnerships with food waste platforms like Too Good To Go. These *apps* let people buy surplus food from restaurants, convenience retailers and producers to stop it from going to waste. BP, Aldi, SPAR Denmark, The Co-

Op, EG Group, and more recently Aral are some of the brands already working with Too Good To Go. According to the company, 86,490,418 meals have been saved from c-stores and supermarkets through their system, amounting to over 216,226 tonnes of CO2.

"The Too Good To Go app is a great way to reduce food waste at our service stations. The concept works - delicious food is no longer thrown away, while at the same time we conserve valuable resources. During the pilot phase, users bought 94% of all the bags on offer, collected them on time, and gave our offer in the app an above-average rating," explained Mechthild Menke, Head of Store Business at Aral. In the future, all 1,200 company-owned Aral service stations in Germany will participate in the platform.

Last year, Spar also announced an international partnership with food tech company Whywaste to support their food waste reduction strategy. The advanced digital date-checking app identifies and keeps track of products that are about to reach their sell-by date. Results from Spar stores using Whywaste's solutions show that they have been able to reduce their food waste by up to 40%, according to the international retailer.



The fight against single-use plastic

Although governments and private enterprises have been taking measures to reduce single-use plastic products, the numbers remain extremely high. Approximately 91% of plastic is not recycled and roughly half of our global annual plastic production is destined for a single-use product, [according to Plastic Oceans](#).

ENOC Group recently banned single use plastic across its operations in the United Arab Emirates

(UAE). The company has switched over to more sustainable items such as paper bags, wooden straws, water dispensers with reusable bottles and recyclable lids.

In July 2021, the European Union put a ban on single-use plastic plates, cutlery, straws, balloon sticks and cotton buds. [New regulations are underway to ban the use of throwaway cups](#) and for mandatory deposit and return schemes for single-use plastic drinks bottles and metal cans. EU officials estimate that 40% of new plastics and 50% of paper are used in packaging.

Consumer packaged goods companies are using innovation to offer new solutions. Coca-Cola unveiled its first-ever beverage bottle made from 100% plant-based plastic, excluding the cap and label, using technologies that are ready for commercial scale.

Someone who was ahead of the curve when it came to the relationship between plastic and supermarkets is Andrew Thornton, convenience visionary and former owner of Thornton's Budgens. In 2018, his London supermarket stocked 1,700 plastic-free products including bread and meat wrapped in paper, fruit and vegetables encased in Beechwood netting, milk in glass bottles, cheese in clear wax wrap and home compostable food bags.

"We eventually launched 2,600 plastic-free lines. We did it for three reasons - reduce the amount of plastic we were responsible for, give customers a chance to have less plastic, and to show big players across the world that it wasn't as difficult as they said. Former Tesco CEO Dave Lewis said we had changed the relationship between plastic and supermarkets worldwide," explains Thornton.

According to him the public "loved it" from day one. Their total sales went up by 6% in the first two weeks, and 4% after that. The extra costs around sustainable packaging and logistics were completely covered by the uplift in sales.

"When we went plastic free our food waste went down. When it came to fresh fruit and veg, we changed our merchandising equipment. If you look at a fruit and veg department with no plastic in it, it looks amazing. People bought more. We changed the supply chain - we were buying directly through wholesalers from the market," he adds.

Thornton believes businesses need to start acting from the heart and less from the head - "a heart-centred approach will allow us to tackle the climate and inequality crisis." Although he sees some major hurdles for oil companies and petrol stations to reinvent themselves as sustainable businesses, he doesn't see it as an impossible task.