



Denise L. Rondini
Aftermarket Contributing Editor
drondini@truckinginfo.com

“I think [vending machines] would be especially good for the heavy truck business.”

Parts: At a vending machine near you

Typically when we think of vending machines, we think of snack foods or beverages. More recently, however, they are being used in industrial applications.

Companies such as Fastenal and 1sourcevend are installing vending machines in industrial plants, where they vend things like tools, safety glasses, and even small parts. Fastenal has gone one step further with its Fast P.O.D, a shipping container that acts as a mini-store. The shipping containers have been altered to accommodate computer equipment, to improve security, and to include insulation and heating and air conditioning.

Whether a shipping container or a vending machine, the idea is to bring parts closer to the customer.

“I think it will fit [with trucking],” says Mark Hill, president of 1source vend. “As we say here, we manage widgets. We don’t care what they are. It is about management and replenishment of [needed] items.” Initially, Hill thought the vending machines in industrial applications would be used for high-value items, but he says, “a lot of it has turned out to be low-cost items, and that has been driven by the customer.”

He says customers don’t want to run out of things they need, and although places like Amazon and others say they can get a needed item delivered the next day, with a vending machine there is no need to wait.

Will vending machines work in the trucking industry? Bill Wade, managing partner, Wade & Partners, thinks so. “I think it would be especially good for the heavy truck business. You could put all the wear items like belts, hoses, seals, bearings, etc., in them.”

While you might not be able to put a whole suspension in a vending machine, “you definitely could carry rotors, drums, disc brake pads,” he adds. If a pod system was used, Wade believes it could also serve as a core depot, where a fleet could leave used cores for later pickup by a distributor or dealer.


Gary Polipnick, executive vice president of FAST Solution at Fastenal, believes truck stops would be a great place for the company’s Fast P.O.D. or even a vending machine. “It could be used for common things like diesel additives or quarts of oil — some real basic things. It is a no-brainer.” He adds, “Vending machines or Fast P.O.D. systems are accessible 24/7, so if a driver needs something like a headlight, he can pick it up when he stops to eat or use the restroom.”

Current industrial vending machines work via a magnetic swipe card or other device that tracks who has purchased a part. Hill says in addition to tracking purchases by employee, 1sourcevend machines can track which department or which job the part was for. In the case of a vending machine at a truck stop or other more public location, credit card purchases would be allowed.

Both the vending machine and the shipping pods keep track of inventory levels and send alerts when minimum stocking numbers have been reached, allowing for replenishment before a product runs out.

Machines do not have to be stocked with the same products, meaning a distributor or dealer could tailor each machine to a fleet’s specific needs at a specific location.

Think the idea is not realistic for trucking? Remember that it was not that long ago that the idea of Amazon being in the truck parts business seemed far fetched, Wade notes. “Last year Amazon did something like \$1.89 billion in truck parts sales. That would make them the biggest truck parts distributor in the world.”

While a vending machine solution is not going to cover everything, it is one way to get parts closer to the end user. “I think anybody who looks at this idea and doesn’t see a possibility for it is just not looking too hard,” Wade says. 

Denise Rondini offers information and insight to help fleet managers make smart parts and service choices. A highly respected freelance writer in the transportation industry, she has covered the aftermarket and dealer parts and service issues since 1982, and now covers those areas exclusively for Heavy Duty Trucking and Truckinginfo.com. She can be reached at drondini@truckinginfo.com or (773) 951-8563.

RUN WITH THE BULL.

The future is about growth. For more than 100 years, Meritor has been developing the products and technologies to help you grow by creating the products that make your equipment more efficient, more dependable and more profitable. That is a future we can all run with. Run with the future. *Run With The Bull.*

RUN
WITH THE **BULL**



runwiththebull.com

Go to truckinginfo.com/readerservice and click on reader service #188

©2017 Meritor, Inc.