

# SUPERMARKET & RETAILER



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Business knowledge for smart retailers  
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PROFIT FROM MARKET FIRST INFORMATION

## Cold Spell

Refrigeration trends  
& developments in 2023

The future  
of cash handling  
**Cash is king.**  
Or is it?

Delight your customers  
... The frenzied success  
of a new energy drink





Image courtesy of <https://www.multilayertrading.com/>

## FEATURES

### Refrigeration trends & developments

In-store refrigeration is an integral component of a positive shopping experience and essential to a supermarket or wholesaler's business success. Encompassing everything from display units, temperature control, data collection and management, to maintenance, lighting, and close the case technology, it's one of the costliest investments a store will have to make. Topping the list is energy efficiency and sustainability.

### Cash management & security

At a time when cashless transactions, e-wallet technology and online retail is booming, is there still a place for cold, hard cash? The short answer is 'absolutely yes!'. An estimated 23.5% of South

# Contents



Image courtesy of [techsling.com](https://www.techsling.com)

Africa's population is considered 'unbanked', with some R12 billion in cash is believed to be held outside the formal banking system. If anything, cash is more important – and prevalent – today than it has been for years.

### Winter health: Nothing to sneeze at

As winter approaches, retailers and manufacturers should ready themselves to support the consumer's ongoing need for off-the-shelf winter remedies, cold and flu symptom alleviators, immune boosting supplements and alternative treatments. Good nutrition is also key for winter wellness.

## STOREWATCH

### Edeka – Netto Marken – Discount format

Netto offers the widest range of products among all food discounters in Germany, with more than 21 million customers shop in 4 304 branches. With a turnover of 15.8 billion euros (2022), this subsidiary of Edeka-Zentrale is one of the Top 3 in the German food discount market.

## COLUMNS

### Delight your customers

Aki Kalliatakis joined hundreds of other customers queuing at a Checkers branch to get their latest 'fix' – a new energy drink that had previously been selling for up to R700 a bottle at selected petrol stations.

## NEWS

### Instant coffee still South Africa's favourite

The latest findings from BMi Research's March 2023 coffee report show that the coffee industry has continued to perform positively since 2020, when volumes dropped due to the lockdowns meant to curb the spread of Covid-19.

### Comment on an AARTO story

Strict new driving rules for South Africa are on shaky ground, while the Road Traffic Infringement Authority (RTIA) is at pains to make it clear that it will continue with the preparatory tasks required for a national roll-out within three years.

### Humans vs machines: future workplace

The capacity for adaptability of human workers is set to become a vital component of the automated workplace of the future.



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# Slay May ... Thrive in June

## Navigating seasonal shifts and consumer trends in South Africa's supermarket industry



Helen Maister

In the ever-changing retail landscape, nothing is cast in stone. Retailers and brands have already conducted extensive research and analysis to identify the emerging trends specific to the South African market. They have accordingly forecasted demand and made adjustments to their product assortment. Marketing and

promotional efforts have been meticulously planned and executed, with a focus on enhancing the overall customer experience – often spanning a timeline of one to three years in advance.

However, the most crucial part of this cycle lies in the constant need to monitor and adapt. Retailers must remain vigilant in monitoring sales performance, customer feedback and market trends.

This ongoing process is paramount as it enables them to stay agile and make necessary adjustments to their strategies in real-time, leveraging valuable data and consumer feedback. By staying attuned to the dynamic nature of the industry, retailers can swiftly respond to

changing consumer preferences, maintain a competitive edge and consistently deliver exceptional experiences for their customers.



Image courtesy of Dana Devolk, Unsplash

### Refrigeration

In-store refrigeration is crucial for preserving the quality and safety of perishable items while providing customers with a wide range of fresh products and reducing food waste. It is an integral component of a positive shopping experience and essential to a supermarket or wholesaler's business success. Encompassing everything from display units, temperature control, data collection and management, to maintenance, lighting and close-the-case technology, it's one of the costliest investments a store will have to make. Topping the list is energy efficiency

and sustainability – and now, more than ever, it's a conversation that retailers, store and category managers, and solution suppliers need to be having.



Image courtesy of techsling.com

### Cash management & security

At a time when cashless transactions, e-wallet technology and online retail is booming, is there still a place for cold, hard cash? The short answer is 'absolutely yes!' According to statistics from the Oxford Business Group, an estimated 23.5% of South Africa's population is considered 'unbanked', with some R12 billion in cash believed to be held outside the formal banking system.

If anything, cash is more important – and prevalent – today than it has been for years. The recent pandemic changed many things about our society, one of which was our need for easy access to cash in case of emergency, and the risk of financial institution instability. Governments around the world were also forced to print more money in support of those who found themselves losing their incomes, businesses and jobs.

*Helen Maister*

Helen Maister



## Cut Through the Clutter with Zebra's Task Management!

Zebra Task Management is a task management system designed to help businesses improve their efficiency and productivity. It provides a comprehensive suite of tools that allow businesses to easily manage tasks, assign tasks to team members, and track progress. The system also offers features such as task reminders, task scheduling, and real-time reporting.

### Where Zebra Task Management Makes a Difference:

- Zebra Task Management is designed to help organizations improve the efficiency of their operations by streamlining task management processes.
- Provides a centralized platform that enables users to easily assign, track, and report on tasks in real time.
- Offers advanced analytics and reporting to help managers identify trends and optimize their operations.
- Automating and simplifying task management, Zebra Task Management helps organizations reduce costs and improve customer service. It also helps to ensure compliance with industry regulations and standards.

Zebra Task Management is a cloud-based task management platform that can be utilized in any industry to manage tasks, resources, and workflow. The platform can be used to assign tasks to team members, track progress and deadlines, and collaborate on projects in real time. This allows for a more efficient and productive workflow and can help organizations save time and money.

In the medical industry, Zebra Task Management can be used to manage patient care, keep track of medical records, assign tasks to medical staff, and ensure that all tasks are completed in a timely manner.

In the retail industry, Zebra Task Management can be used to track inventory and sales, assign tasks to store personnel, set deadlines for tasks and projects, and ensure that all tasks are completed on time.

In the warehouse industry, Zebra Task Management can be used to manage inventory, track shipments, assign tasks to warehouse personnel, and ensure that all tasks are completed on time. It can also be used to track production, ensure quality control, and reduce errors.



[www.identitec.co.za](http://www.identitec.co.za)

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# The frenzied success of a new energy drink

Aki Kalliatakis

aki@leadershiplaunchpad.co.za

This is the next article in a series on how behavioural economics and 'being human' affects your business.

In the early morning of Monday 1st May, with my wife rolling her eyes, I took my sons to Checkers in our neighbourhood, and we joined hundreds of other customers queuing to get their latest 'fix', a new energy drink that had previously been selling for up to R700 a bottle at selected petrol stations. To their great credit, the marketing team at the retailer had seen what was coming and responded magnificently to the challenge.

Once in a while a new product is launched with massive hype and seems to dominate headlines – blows up social media, and leads to frenzied consumer buying.

Now that the dust has settled, it's a good time to take a look back at the launch of Prime Energy drinks.

My favourite story was of a young English boy who bought as many as he could, drank them up and then sold the empty bottles for a huge markup. According to the YouTube write-up, "Charlie Smith, ten, braved excessive queues outside Asda stores last month to get his hands on the drink, which was created by YouTube stars Logan Paul and KSI."



Image courtesy of menshealth.com

And good for him!

But as a case study in human psychology and behavioural economics, this ticks so many astute marketing boxes. Because human beings are so resistant to change and breaking habits, there are many tactics marketers use to 'manipulate' buying behaviours, or to nudge consumers into doing things that are not always logical. These biases and heuristics/shortcuts – and there are more than 1000 of them – are very powerful.

Prime used at least 20 heuristics and psychological biases that make it very desirable and cool for their target market. We can't go into all of them here, but I'd like to highlight a few, and you can use these lessons in your own business.

Perhaps the most powerful is the power of scarcity bias working in tandem with loss aversion. By severely limiting stocks, stating that there could be "only 8 per customer" or "only while stocks last"

**Heuristic, or heuristic technique**, is any approach to problem solving or self-discovery that employs a practical method that is not guaranteed to be optimal, perfect, or rational, but is nevertheless sufficient for reaching an immediate, short-term goal or approximation. [Wikipedia](#)

**Veblen goods** such as luxury cars are considered desirable consumer products for conspicuous consumption because of, rather than despite, their high prices. [Wikipedia](#)





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SCAN ME

and reducing the number of outlets where the drink was available, the company created a sense of urgency to buy this at any cost. Apple and many other companies use this tactic when they launch a new product, and they do it well. In some cases, customers are in fact horribly disadvantaged, such as when they make really bad investment decisions.

But another factor was also at play with the unbelievably high price, and it's the bias known to play a role with so-called Veblen Goods. The extreme price is what makes it attractive, and just about all luxurious products display this. Being on the overcrowded beach in Plettenberg Bay and queueing for dinner at an expensive restaurant every night in December is not a definition of a good holiday – but it does give people bragging rights. "Look at me. I can afford it!"

At the other end of the transaction is the principle of 'costly signalling'. This essentially happens when the more money or resources a business spends to market their products or brand, the more trust a customer will have in the brand. For instance ...

“... if you see a new appliance advertised on TV that has paid for an expensive advertisement with a costly celebrity like George Clooney, you assume that the brand must be successful, and they have to live up to their reputation because they have that much more to lose.”

Image courtesy of nestle-nespresso.com



The use of cool influencers – people who are sexy and desirable – is not new nor unique. Just a couple of columns ago I discussed how a coffee brand uses George Clooney and actress Camille Cottin to promote customer fantasies: "If I buy the pods and drink the coffee I may just one day wake up next to him/her."

We know that the success of Prime Energy drinks would not have happened without the power of social media, and YouTube in particular. The promoters of the drink report that they have sold in excess of \$250m worth ... and that excludes SA sales.

But that is a fraction of perhaps the most famous YouTuber of them all who has had billions of views of his videos ...

“Mr Beast promoted many products and brands, including other drinks and Patagonia sporting gear, and even created his own fast-food chain. He started when he was 13, but what makes his channel so appealing is that it's just different.”

Mr Beast once sawed through a wooden kitchen table with a plastic knife. It took many hours, was undeniably terribly dull, and yet still garnered more than 3,5 million views.

But there is also something else playing a role here ... the psychologists call it 'input bias'. It basically says that when customers notice how much time, effort and money you have put into creating something, they value it more, even more so when nobody has ever tackled anything like this before. For example, when you see how much effort goes into preparing a meal, you actually enjoy it more.

Speaking of Patagonia, they also use costly signalling to showcase their values ... for example, they refuse to sell their corporate vests to people who work in companies that damage the environment, like oil companies, mining companies, and finance firms.

This decision ultimately changed how people perceived the brand, making some value it more.

We also shouldn't ignore the power of the tribe. Communities of people with something in common, in this case teenagers and their

friends, can explain many behaviours that we saw with the drink ...

- The **Bandwagon Effect** ... "You're seriously NOT COOL if you don't buy this."
- **In-Group Bias**: at this age we are establishing our independence from our weird parents and as an act of rebellion – we will do exactly opposite



Image courtesy of marca.com

MR BEAST



of what our parents do. (I have a feeling that there may even be a rebellion against other energy drinks like Red Bull, which at some point was unique, but is now totally mainstream.)

Image courtesy of sproutsocial.com



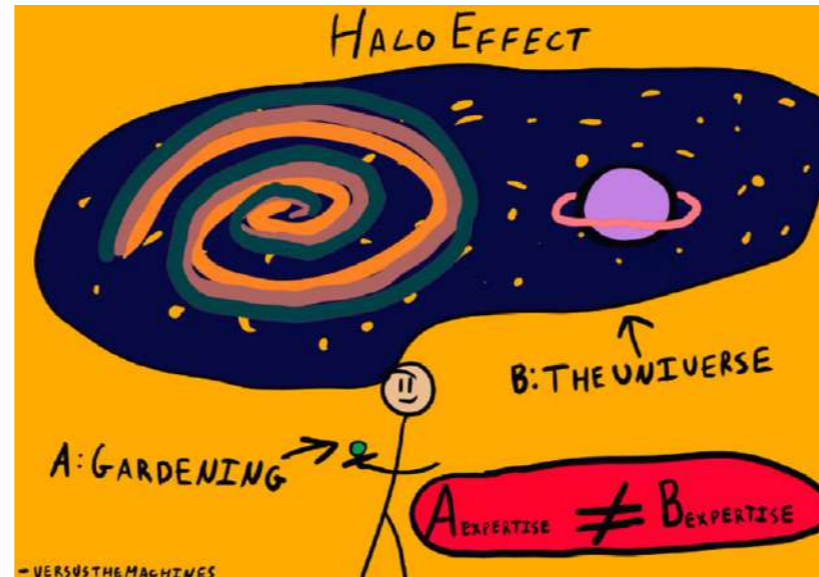
### Social Proof

Social proof is a phenomenon where people follow and copy the actions of others in order to display accepted or correct behaviour, based on the idea of normative social influence.

**Social Proof** means that we are comfortable doing this irrational thing because all our friends and peers are also doing this. It happens at all ages.

When you combine social proof with the **Halo Effect** it boosts the power disproportionately. I know that my fellow golf fans are going to get cross with me, but when we pay a fortune to follow famous golfers on a course, walking in only selected limited paths, and being ordered around like schoolchildren, well, maybe it's because I think that somehow I'm also great if I'm just in their presence.

Image courtesy of thedecisionlab.com/biases/



### Halo Effect

A cognitive bias that claims that positive impressions of people, brands and products in one area positively influence our feelings in another area.

Image courtesy of brandmarketingblog.com



### Framing Effect

How a piece of information is framed can make it more or less effective at changing behaviour.

Finally, I'd like to focus on specifically what the marketing decision makers shrewdly and incisively did at Checkers, and it's related to the **Framing Effect**. Understanding the hype amongst young people from overseas and seeing what happened at those isolated petrol stations

who sold the drinks at a huge price, they offered it for a 'mere' R40 a bottle. How you frame the price gives people a chance to justify the price. "Wow, that is so cheap!"

Which just goes to show the old adage that "people buy emotionally and then justify with logic" is true.

Image courtesy of youtube.com



### What are the future prospects for Prime?

My prediction is that it's going to fail to sustain what happened. Why? First, sense eventually prevails, because after all it's just water, sugar, caffeine and mysterious X-factor. In addition, early studies are showing it's no good for kids and pregnant women.

But most importantly, it's now UNCOOL! I mean, kids are very soon going to say, "What? Checkers"?! No, let's move on now." **SR**



Aki Kalliatakis is the managing partner of The Leadership LaunchPad, a company dedicated to helping clients become more customer driven. He can be contacted at +27 (0) 83 379 3466, or via the website at [www.leadershiplaunchpad.co.za](http://www.leadershiplaunchpad.co.za)

Serves: 4  
Preparation time: 130 minutes  
Cooking time: 40 minutes

## GOLDI, COUNTY FAIR, FESTIVE or MOUNTAIN VALLEY Chicken Drumsticks

### INGREDIENTS

#### Chicken:

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ½ cup double-cream yoghurt | 1 can cherry tomatoes        |
| 8 chicken drumsticks       | 2 tsp turmeric               |
| 3 tbsp oil                 | 2 tsp garam masala           |
| 1 onion, chopped           | 2 tsp ground coriander       |
| 4 garlic cloves, minced    | 2 tsp ground cumin           |
| 1cm ginger, grated         | 1 cup cream                  |
| 3 tbsp tomato paste        | 10g fresh coriander, chopped |
| 1 tsp chilli flakes        |                              |

Ideal for a family meal

Tasty & Delicious

## CHICKEN TIKKA

Did you know that chicken tikka was popularised by South Asian cooks living in Great Britain?

#### Method:

1. Marinate the chicken in yoghurt for 2 hours.
2. Add a dash of oil to a pot. Add the onions, garlic, and ginger and fry for a minute or two.
3. Add the tomato paste and chilli. Cook, stirring, until the paste's colour changes.
4. Add the tomatoes and spices. Simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Gently add the chicken to the pot and cook for 20 minutes.
6. Add the cream and coriander, and serve over rice.

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Serves: 6  
Preparation time: 20 minutes  
Cooking time: 44 minutes

## GOLDI, COUNTY FAIR, FESTIVE or MOUNTAIN VALLEY Chicken Pieces

### INGREDIENTS

#### Chicken:

- |                         |                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2 tbsp oil              | 1 tsp paprika                     |
| 6 chicken pieces        | 250g long-grain rice              |
| 1 onion, chopped        | 1½ cup chicken stock              |
| 2 garlic cloves, minced | 1 green pepper, chopped           |
| 2 tsp ground coriander  | 4 sprigs fresh coriander, chopped |

Ideal for a family meal

Tasty & Delicious

## ONE-POT CHICKEN AND RICE

Tummy rumbling? Brown chicken pieces and cook with rice, spices and coriander for a satisfying meal in minutes.

#### Method:

1. Heat oil in a pot and brown the chicken all over. Remove and put on a plate.
2. Sweat the onions in the same pot until soft. Add garlic and spices and cook for 2 minutes.
3. Stir in the rice and browned chicken.
4. Cover with stock and bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 30 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through.
5. Scatter the green pepper and coriander over the chicken, and season with salt and pepper.

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# Cold Spell

## Refrigeration trends & developments in 2023

In-store refrigeration is crucial for preserving the quality and safety of perishable items while providing customers with a wide range of fresh products and reducing food waste. It is an integral component of a positive shopping experience and essential to a supermarket or wholesaler's business success. Encompassing everything from display units, temperature control, data collection and management, to maintenance, lighting, and close the case technology, it's one of the costliest investments a store will have to make. Topping the list is energy efficiency and sustainability, and now more than ever, it's a conversation that retailers, store and category managers, and solution suppliers need to be having.

Naturally, with the energy crisis (is it fair to call it a national energy disaster yet?) battering South Africa, energy efficiency, reducing usage, and alternative or uninterrupted power supplies are a critical talking point. The need to reduce carbon emissions and evolve more sustainable, environmentally friendly commercial refrigeration solutions continues to grow more urgent. Adopting new technologies, along with engaging the relevant industry experts, is vital for this transformation.



Image courtesy of Dana Devolk, Unsplash

### Refrigeration monitoring

**Better system performance, reduced downtime, and improved decision-making regarding maintenance and energy management.**

An international hot topic, refrigeration monitoring is imperative. With applications ranging from maintaining your cold chain to ensuring the safety, quality, and shelf-life of your refrigerated and frozen produce, effectively monitoring your refrigeration units has never been easier.

Regular monitoring is essential for ensuring the proper functioning of in-store refrigeration systems, to check for leaks, monitor temperature levels and for the early detection of malfunctions. While in the long run this is an investment that will save you money, it can be a somewhat costly undertaking if you decide to go fully wireless, with top quality tech and all the bells and whistles.

That said, the insights and preventative maintenance benefits you get from in-depth data collection and analytics can be invaluable. Understanding your energy usage, and spotting irregularities before they



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become major problems, makes good business sense, particularly in the age of load shedding and an unstable power supply.

In terms of maintaining a safe and effective cold chain, an end-to-end monitoring system can be implemented in production facilities, refrigerated vehicles, storage facilities and in-store refrigeration units. Thanks to recent advancements in both software and hardware, these systems are compact and highly agile, able to be configured to a store's specific needs. By making use of the GSM/cell phone network to transmit readings to a centralised cloud-based reporting system, this solution is reliable, effective, and easy-to-use. Real-time temperature and humidity monitoring optimises your cold chain, and mobile dashboards make monitoring easy. With the right data analytics in place, the information received can be an asset to your risk management strategy as well as your electricity bill.

Image courtesy of C. Toro, Pexels



“Effectively monitoring your cold chain is imperative, as load shedding and unscheduled power outages can result in food spoilage, contamination, and food safety concerns. With real time monitoring and alerts, retailers and wholesalers are able to prevent serious stock loss and food contamination.”



Image courtesy of <https://www.multilayertrading.com/>

### Refrigeration, the cold chain and load shedding

When it comes to refrigeration, supermarkets, hypers and wholesalers are having a tough time of it. Soaring energy costs, the shocking state of the national power grid, and supply chain constraints are competing with a growing demand for sustainability and accountability. There's also a legal and moral obligation to reduce carbon emissions, use less energy and cut down on costs. It's good to know that energy efficient solutions are top of mind for most manufacturers.

Christopher Visser, CEO of Multilayer Trading, has first-hand knowledge of the impact of load shedding on commercial refrigeration. He says, "The recent challenges of load shedding have put the refrigeration industry under a spotlight, prompting a focused discussion on energy-efficient equipment. It's become clear that the financial returns from investing in such equipment are considerable, especially when you compare



Image courtesy of <https://procoolmfg.com/>

Glass refrigerator door manufacture

the expenses of running inefficient systems on generators and alternative power sources.”

He goes on to add, "Practical solutions to combat the effects of load shedding and reduce operational costs are closer than we might think. Simple changes like adding doors to refrigeration units can be of benefit, but including doors in the initial design drives maximum efficiency and potentially reduces energy demand by 50–70%.”

Visser takes a refreshingly optimistic approach, and his optimism helps stave off the sense of doom



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that tends to take hold when one considers the state of the South African power grid.

He says, “The adoption of highly efficient technology, like self-contained island freezers with glass lids, eliminates the need for defrost and glass heaters, making a significant dent in retailers’ operational costs.”

Locally based manufacturer of self-contained commercial fridges and freezers Staycold International, understands the challenges facing the refrigeration industry in South Africa.

Primarily servicing the beverage and hospitality industries, one of their biggest concerns now is buffering the cost of manufacturing during load shedding.

“While quality products tend to cost more, and with the additional costs incurred while manufacturing during load shedding, Staycold still needs to produce units that are affordable.”

MD Lena Le Roux says, “To manufacture a quality product, we need quality materials. The problem is getting good quality materials, on time, and at an affordable price.”

“Staycold works off solar as far as possible to combat load shedding, making use of flexible production hours, and working around the associated issues of cost and carbon footprint, but it isn’t easy, or cheap.”

The impact on their employees is not insignificant. Neither is the physical impact of load shedding on refrigeration units, as Le Roux explains. She says, “A beverage cooler that can sustain optimal temperatures during load shedding, and also withstand the associated power dips and surges requires a digital controller that protects the unit.”



Image courtesy  
of Luca Nardone, Pexels

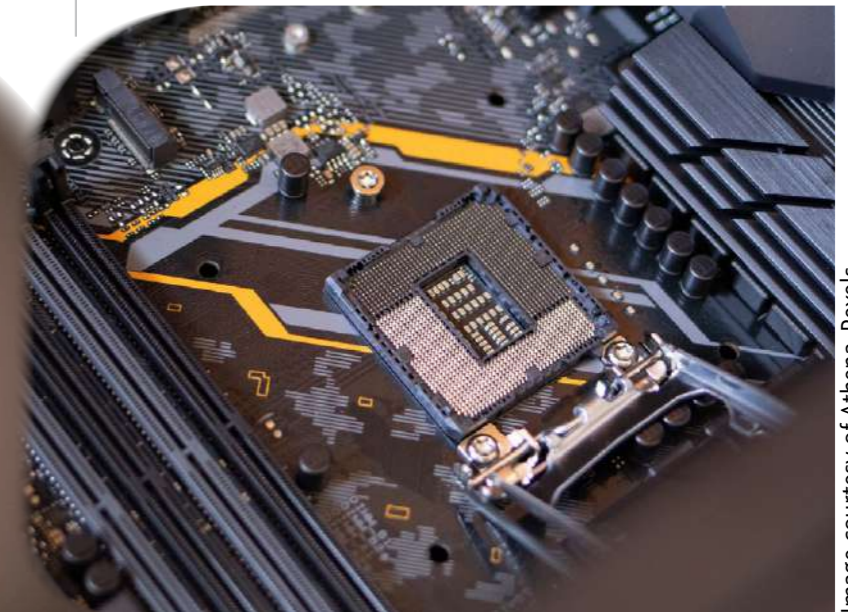


Image courtesy of Athena, Pexels

The controllers are part of most generic refrigeration models, but they have their limits, and we are seeing massive spikes. I think you could reasonably expect about 80% protection, but that’s not always going to be sufficient.”





*Staycold is not just  
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# Staycold International's ISO Quality Standard Renewal

Staycold International has just been reissued with their ISO 9001:2015 quality management system accreditation. ISO 9001 compliance documents their business's ability to comply with high international quality standards and assists with identifying practices that align with the goal of minimizing quality related issues. For Staycold, adherence to this standard gives them and their customers confidence that the self-contained commercial fridges and freezers they manufacture, are built to the highest of quality standards.

The ISO certification is adjudicated and issued independently by QAS International with Staycold receiving their renewed certificate in April 2023. QAS International is one of the several internationally recognized bodies who conduct audits on requesting companies on a yearly basis for best practices in several different fields. ISO 9001:2015 is the quality management system (QMS) standard that Staycold have implemented at their head office and manufacturing facility in Parys, Free State.

Staycold voluntarily choose this system and certification of their business to ensure the quality of the units they manufacture for the beverage, retail and hospitality industries. This also helps to ensure they have a continuous product and quality improvement mindset assisted by the processing of the ISO manual that the system requires. The certification is also important for Staycold's clients as it gives them the confidence that the units they are procuring or considering, are manufactured in a facility that complies with international standards.

Lena le Roux, MD of Staycold International was pleased to receive this certificate and commented: "This is one of the steps we take to ensure that we manufacture and supply a quality product. It's important for us that quality remains at our core and is one of our pioneering principles we have become known for. So this ISO quality standard renewal is key for us so our customers can trust the experience."

For more information on Staycold ...

Contact them on 056 819 8097 or visit their website on [www.staycold.co.za](http://www.staycold.co.za) or LinkedIn page on <https://www.linkedin.com/company/staycold-international-pty-ltd/>  
About Staycold International



STAYCOLD is a leading South African manufacturer of self-contained commercial fridges and freezers primarily for the beverage and hospitality industries. From its factory in Parys, the coolers are shipped world-wide, meeting the stringent business and quality requirements of many countries.



Image: Daniah Abdullah, Pexels



## Solar power – is it really the answer?

South Africans are looking to solar as an alternative power source like never before. And despite the prohibitive costs, for those who can afford it, it's certainly a viable option for keeping a store operational during power outages.

With rent-to-buy options becoming increasingly popular, more businesses are able to consider the solar option. But it's not all plain sailing. For retailers in large complexes or shopping malls, finding the roof space, and getting their systems wired in, can be more as much of a headache as load shedding.

For those who can implement solar solutions, finding an installer who understands both the solar solution and the retailer's specific power needs can be a challenge. Refrigeration, for example, comprises several different entities working within a system – each of these has different power needs. These all need to be taken into consideration when tying an existing refrigeration system into a new solar installation.

For Multilayer Trading's Visser, solar is certainly a viable option. He says, "Solar energy systems present another promising solution, although they do come with their unique set of complexities. Initial capital costs can be substantial, thus demanding careful consideration of the return on investment."

Cooling as a Service, Renewable Power and Outsourced Steam\_energypartners.co.za



"Nevertheless, persistent advancements in technology are enhancing the efficiency of both solar systems and refrigeration units, making them increasingly viable investments."

Staycold makes use of solar power in their manufacturing process, and Le Roux believes that while experts do expect costs to come down as demand increases and supply matches pace, this will only happen in the future.

"Retailers need to look to their survival now." For those that do choose the solar route, she warns, simply slotting your existing systems into a solar supply is not an option.

"Each of the commodities in a refrigeration system work in isolation," explains Le Roux. "Their applications and power needs are different, and this must be accommodated at the design stage. It is imperative that installations and hook ups are implemented by an expert."

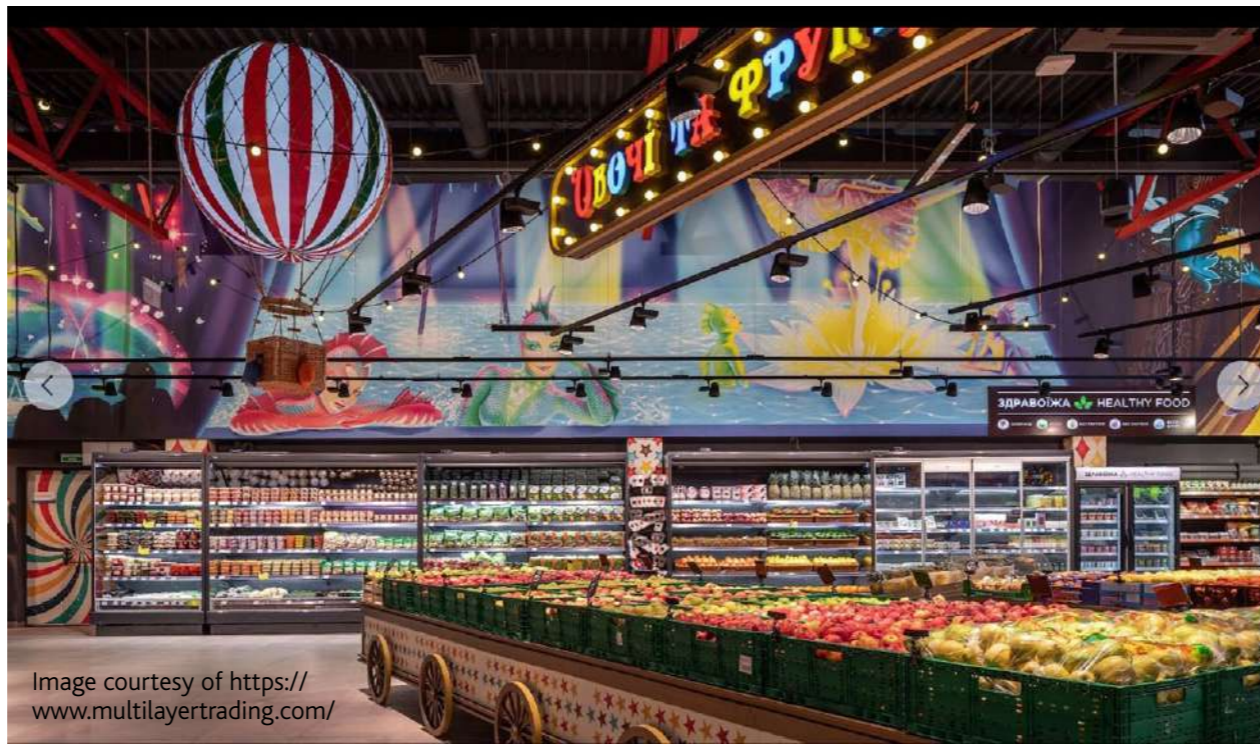


Image courtesy of <https://www.multilayertrading.com/>



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She adds, “We need more innovation in this area. We need innovative solar solutions for refrigeration, and we need clever tech solutions that can support these solar solutions. We also need our European supply chain to come up with affordable and practical solar solutions, but this is obviously a much less pressing concern for them than it is for us at this time.”

Visser advises that while there is ongoing research into alternative power sources in South Africa, it’s crucial that the industry first takes a hard look at the efficiency of the equipment already in place. “Properly executed, this could pave the way for greater sustainable use of alternative energy sources, possibly reducing the originally anticipated energy requirements by 50-70%. This approach promises a more energy-efficient future for the refrigeration sector, ultimately substantially lowering costs and promoting a model that is more sustainable.”

### Supply chain challenges

Much like the rest of the tech world, ongoing effects of an extended lockdown in China along with a protracted war in the Ukraine has and continues to have a damaging effect on the cost, quality, and availability of electrical parts and tech hardware. For anyone using digital controllers, chips, or any of the chemicals used in the production of technological parts and hardware, this effect has been significant and noticeable.

Le Roux says, “The war in Ukraine is affecting the supply of certain chemicals and raw materials that are absolutely critical to the manufacturing process, and the ongoing effect of the extended lockdown in China also affected the supply of certain technical parts.”

“Not everyone has experienced the same challenges, or to the same extent, however. In many cases the impact is determined by the specific supply chains used by different manufacturers and producers. In some instances, alternative raw material and component suppliers are stepping up to take advantage of the situation.”

The jury is out on whether this impacts quality, and it remains to be seen if these supply issues will be resolved or remain an obstacle.



Images courtesy of  
<https://www.petitforestier.com/>



## Sustainable, energy efficient retail refrigeration

The refrigeration industry is well aware of the impact their products have on the environment. Consumer awareness, legislation and sustainability pressures have ensured that any modern unit worth its salt is, energy efficient and able to make use of eco-friendly coolants. Many of them also come with eco-modes designed to conserve energy. So what else sets them apart? "Quality," says Le Roux, "and longevity."

“ It’s not enough for refrigeration systems to meet the bare minimum in terms of energy efficiency requirements anymore. They need robust defence against the unstable power grid, they need a sustainable lifespan, and they have to be optimally energy efficient. ”

Visser agrees, adding, "The pace of technological improvements in the past decade has been nothing short of astounding, leading to exponential increases in system energy efficiencies."

Daniel De Beer, Regional Manager for Sub Saharan Africa at Emerson Commercial & Residential Solutions, is an expert on energy efficiency. He acknowledges the place that technology such as smart controllers and the Internet of Things (IoT) has in energy-efficient refrigeration solutions, but he cautions against investing in this tech without also investing in the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed for it to be integrated successfully.

That said, he is a firm proponent of preventative maintenance. Sometimes the simplest changes

Image courtesy of [www.solcab.co.za/](http://www.solcab.co.za/)



Image courtesy of [www.insulatedstructures.co.za/](http://www.insulatedstructures.co.za/)

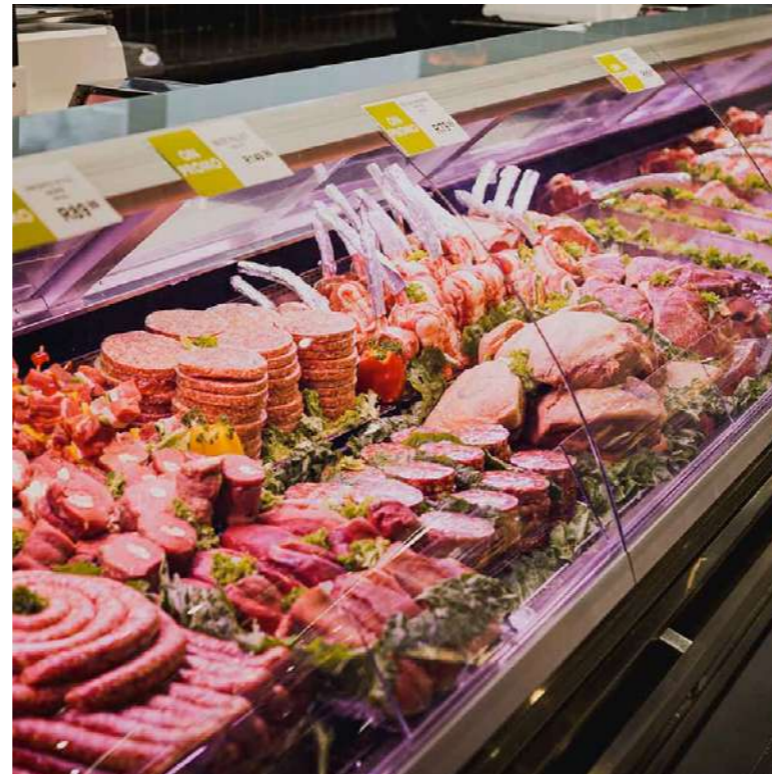


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and minor tweaks can lead to considerable reductions in operational costs over time. By Emerson's calculations, retailers are using 70% of their energy consumption for refrigeration alone. Roughly 50% of that usage can be attributed to compressors, so a savings of 20% on your electricity consumption is significant.

Although incorporating many of these new, energy-efficient solutions and products in the design phase is the most effective approach, there are also many retrofit solutions – such as close the case technology – that can be implemented easily and somewhat cost-effectively into existing systems.

It remains clear that thanks to the advancements and developments in technology, processes, refrigerants, components, and more, running an energy efficient refrigeration system is certainly possible. In addition, being environmentally conscious and sustainable is no longer a costly exercise with little notable benefit – the cost savings in reduced energy consumption alone make this the obvious strategy for your store.

Image courtesy of [www.insulatedstructures.co.za/](http://www.insulatedstructures.co.za/)



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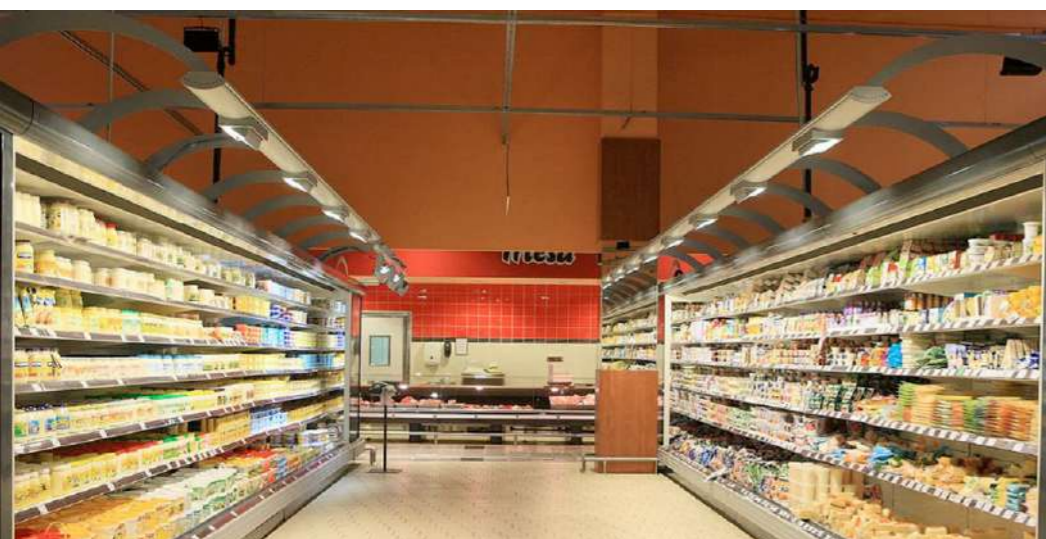


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Image courtesy of [www.insulatedstructures.co.za](http://www.insulatedstructures.co.za)



## Are you respecting your refrigeration during load shedding?

The impact of load shedding and power outages can be mitigated with consideration and having contingency plans in place ...

- Tests show that refrigeration units can only maintain their internal temperature for two hours during load shedding – and this is with no accidental opening of the doors.
- Temperatures inside the unit can rise from 4°C to 8°C after two hours of load shedding, which can lead to food contamination.

- Be sure to manage and enforce your in-store processes for food safety, product integrity, legal and regulatory compliance, to minimise your financial losses, and to retain consumer trust, confidence and loyalty.
- Remember not to put added strain on an already strained situation.
  - Don't load shelves and fridges during load shedding.
  - Educate employees and shoppers against leaving doors open for longer than absolutely necessary.



Image courtesy of <https://www.timeslive.co.za/>

|   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| <p><b>Wheelie Bin-120L, 240L, 360L</b></p>   |  | <p><b>Wheelie Bin-660L &amp; 1100L</b></p>   |  | <p><b>Pallet Bin - Solid or Perforated</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 500kg or 1000kg</li> <li>- Lids, Castors, And Outlet Valves are optional extras</li> </ul> |  | <p><b>Pallet Jacks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2000 to 5000 kg</li> <li>- 1200 x 685mm</li> <li>- 1500 X 685mm</li> <li>- 1800 X 685mm</li> </ul>  |  | <p><b>Self Lifting Stacker</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lifts 500kg Max</li> <li>- Lifts up to 1300mm</li> <li>- Electric Lift</li> <li>- Manual Push/Pull</li> <li>- Suitable for on-site loading &amp; offloading with little to no manual labour</li> </ul>  |  |
| <p><b>Pharmaceutical Hygienic Pallet</b></p>  <p>1200mm x 1000mm x 150mm</p>   |  | <p><b>Aluminium Pallet</b></p>  <p>1200mm x 1000mm x 150mm</p>                                 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



**Insulated Structures**  
*Efficiency At Work*

## Effective solutions to reduce the cost of in-store refrigeration

### Polyurethane Injected Panels

- Standard panels: Outer and inner skin of frost white Chromodek, also available in black finish.
- Polyurethane injected panels for superior insulation and adhesion.
- High-impact PVC interlock profiles on all edges provides totally sealed insulation and a perfect vapour barrier.
- Tongue and Groove panel options available.
- Easily erected.
- Optional skin finish in Stainless Steel – Grades AISI 304 AIS 403.

## Cold & Freezer Rooms



### Floors – Fabricated and Concrete

#### Fabricated Floors

- The inside floor finish is 1.5mm Aluminium tread plate glued and screwed to a marine ply base.
- Galvanised plate options available in lieu of the Aluminium Chequer Plate finish.

#### Concrete Floor

- Concrete floors are used for flush or step-up entry and in permanent structures. Usually a recess of 150–170mm is used to accommodate the foam slab insulation and the concrete screed.



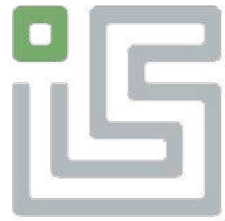
### Meat Rails

- Hot Dipped Galvanised system.
- Support structure integrated into insulated panels.
- Optional free-standing continuous galvanised system with bends and switch gear.

### Aluminium Chequer Plate

- Installed as an option to protect panels from scratches and light impact damage.
- 1.5mm and 2.0mm thick options.
- Standard height 1 250mm AFFL.





**Insulated Structures**  
Efficiency At Work



Up to 40%  
Energy Saving



New or Retrofit  
Existing cases

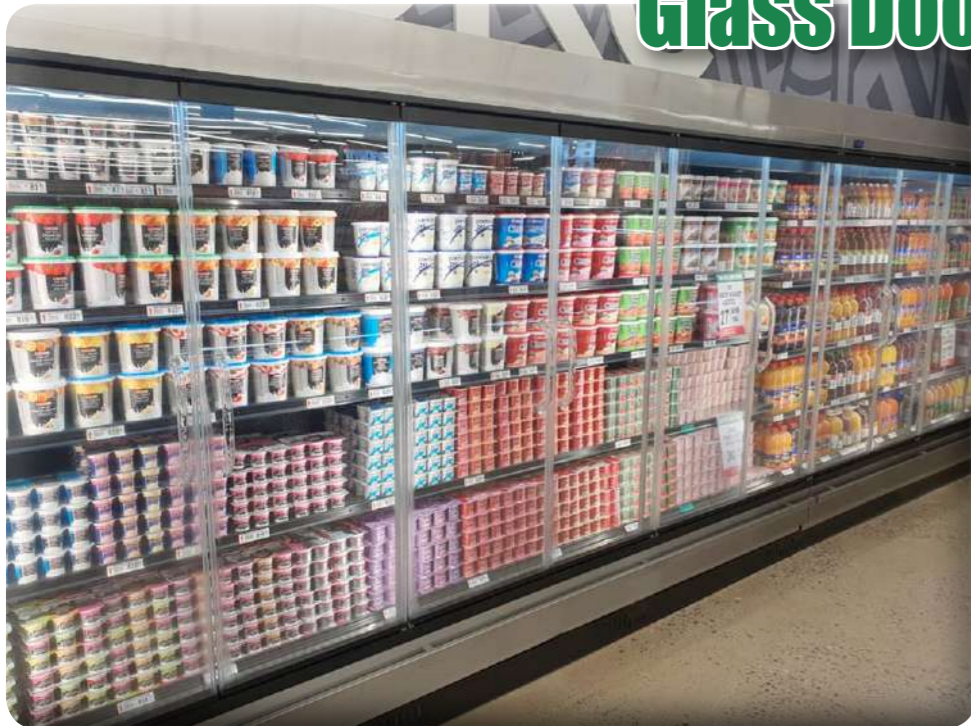


Environment  
Respect

## Benefits of Airshield Glass Doors

- Reduce Energy consumption.
- Extend Product shelf life.
- Double Glazed Argon filled void for better insulation.
- Optimal Product temperature.
- Glass doors have an option of Mullion lights. Quoted separate.
- Handles included.
- Up to 40% energy saving.
- Solution for new cabinets or retrofitted on existing cabinets.
- Doors are spring loaded.
- Less cold air spillage – warmer aisles.

## Airshield Glass Doors



## Ways to save

With energy cost rising and food retailers looking to improve the shopping experience environment for customers, Insulated Structures has developed an effective solution to reduce the cost of in-store refrigeration while enhancing the customer experience.

Insulated Structures doors are easy to retrofit on in-store cabinets to reduce the energy required to keep chilled foods at the correct temperature.

Meanwhile, customers are able to clearly see and access the products on offer. Reduced energy requirements means smaller refrigeration plant selection for new stores. These savings will off-set the initial cost of the doors. Up to 40% reduction in refrigeration requirement has been achieved.



Standard Airshield Glass Doors with a Black Frame.  
Heated Hybrid also available in this design.  
Heated Hybrid Glass Doors are fitted with a heater to reduce condensation on the doors in Coastal areas.  
Heated Hybrid is fitted with soft closers.

Premium Airshield Glass Doors.  
Frameless Door with Argon Gas filled for better insulation.



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# The internet of things – why it belongs in commercial refrigeration



According to American-based managed connectivity specialists OptConnect, the Internet of Things (IoT) offers many benefits to the retail refrigeration sector, including ...

**“Real-Time Monitoring.** Integrated IoT sensors allow users to monitor conditions such as internal and external temperature, humidity and power usage. It also enables managers to remotely assess conditions and manage their system from their phone or computer 24/7. Users can set alerts for when the system reaches certain power or temperature thresholds and receive immediate notifications on their mobile device.

**“Maintenance and Diagnostics.** IoT technology provides insights that allow managers to schedule maintenance on their units and foresee issues before there is a problem. It also provides technicians with the capability to diagnose equipment remotely and pinpoint the problem precisely. The result is less onsite service calls reduced maintenance and repair costs and less downtime.



Images courtesy of <https://www.optconnect.com/>

That means refrigeration units work at full capacity when necessary and enter a lower power consumption state when less cooling is required. This increases efficiency, reduces costs, and leads to longer equipment life.”

**“Increased Efficiency.** The IoT network is able to use data from sensors to analyse real-world conditions and make adjustments in real-time.



Reliability is crucial in this sector, and small problems can become costly breakdowns quickly. This is why engaging industry experts to implement and even manage your refrigeration monitoring and control systems should be given serious consideration. Smart controllers, connected monitors, and cloud-based data management and analytics are no longer the stuff of futuristic stores and new designs – they should be part of every retailer and wholesaler’s refrigeration protection and defence. **SR**



**Ann Baker-Keulemans** writes on topics related to business, lifestyle, technology, and health, with extensive knowledge on the SA retail and wholesale landscape. Contact [annbk@wilkinsross.co.za](mailto:annbk@wilkinsross.co.za) | [www.wilkinsrossglobal.com](http://www.wilkinsrossglobal.com)



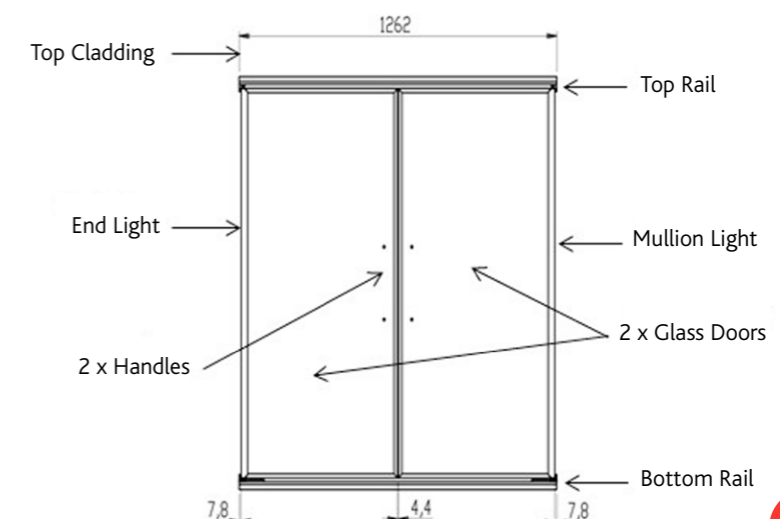
## Close The Case

Designed as a retrofit solution for existing Supermarket display cases, the Glacier Air Shield Glass Doors offer up to a 40% energy saving in an ever-increasing energy cost environment as well as improved cabinet temperatures and product benefits.



## Features and Benefits

- Reduced energy consumption.
- Extended product shelf life.
- Double glazed Argon Gas filled void for superior insulation.
- Optimal product temperatures.
- Spring loaded glass doors.
- Solutions for new cabinets or retrofitted on existing cabinets.
- Less cold air spillage – warmer aisles.
- Optional Mullion LED lights and door hold-open brackets.
- Heated option on our Standard Airshield Doors to suit coastal conditions.
- Integrated (full length) handle option.



## Infinity / Infinity Integrate Glass Doors

The new Infinity Glass Door is designed with edge-to-edge glass and screen print border. This door offers increased visibility and a more modernised look and feel. Glacier has also launched their new Integrated Glass Door which incorporates a full length profiled handle.

### Low Temp Eco Leaf (Energy Saving) Doors Aluminium Frames:

- Heated Door and Architrave
- Natural 15 micron anodized or black textured powder coating (Coating to SABS standards).

#### Glass

- Safety toughened 4mm glass inside and outside standard on all doors. (Toughened to SABS standards).
- All Glass Doors are Argon Gas filled for superior insulation.
- Low temperature doors are fitted with a heated front glass and a clear rear glass, both safety toughened.

### Normal Temp Doors Aluminium Frames:

- Door and heated Architrave
- Natural 15 micron anodized or black textured powder coating (Coating to SABS standards)
- There is a thermal break on the inside of the door frame.
- All architraves are fitted with anti-sweat heaters.

#### Glass

- Safety toughened 4mm glass inside and outside standard on all doors. (Toughened to SABS standards)
- All Glass Doors are Argon Gas filled for superior insulation.
- Normal temperature doors are fitted with Low emission front glass and a clear rear glass, both safety toughened.

#### Lights (LED)

Energy Saving LED 22W, 6000K, LED Light fitted on the inside of the architrave in a closed polycarbonate light diffuser.



#### Lights (LED)

Energy Saving LED 22W, 6000K, LED Light fitted on the inside of the architrave in a closed polycarbonate light diffuser.

# The future of cash handling

## Cash is king, as the saying goes. Or is it?



Image courtesy of techsling.com

**A**t a time when cashless transactions, e-wallet technology and online retail is booming, is there still a place for cold, hard cash?

The short answer is 'absolutely yes!'. According to statistics from the Oxford Business Group, an estimated 23.5% of South Africa's population is considered 'unbanked', with some R12 billion in cash is believed to be held outside the formal banking system.

If anything, cash is more important – and prevalent – today than it has been for years. The recent pandemic changed many things about our society, one of which was our need for easy access to cash in case of emergency, and the risk of financial institution instability. Governments around the world were also forced to print more money in support of those who found themselves losing their incomes, businesses and jobs.

Despite the multiple options for cashless payments, cash isn't going away anytime soon, and so the pressure on retailers to find new and better ways to handle, manage and secure cash in-store will only continue to grow.



Image courtesy of news24.com

### The value of cash

As a store owner, giving your customers safe and easy access to cash transactions is fundamental to your business. The volume of cash payments your store receives will depend on where you operate, your store format and the size of your store, but providing it as an option is accepting cash about giving your customers the choice to transact with your business on their own terms.

"Cash still has a vital role to play in the retail ecosystem," says Mark Templemore-Walters, Operations Director at cash handling solutions provider Cash Connect.

"People can use cash without involving a third party because they trust it," says Templemore-Walters. "They can pay with cash when there's load shedding, when there's no internet connectivity, or if the card terminal is down. From a retailer's perspective, it's a low-cost way to accept payments. Removing the option of cash payments threatens

to increase financial exclusion among the unbanked and underbanked."

Peter van der Westhuizen, Director of Product Enablement at cash management specialist Deposita, says customers don't want to be in a position where they can't get to their cash. "The South African Reserve Bank recently released stats to show that cash in circulation increased by 8.23% during and post Covid, with over 50% of current transactions occurring through cash," he says.



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“This isn’t a uniquely South African scenario either,” says Van der Westhuizen ...

“ In America, 53% of people use cash more now than they did 12 months ago, and only 13% say they are not using cash at all. In fact, the American bank note market will register a growth of US\$2.7 billion between 2020 and 2025, at a CAGR of 4.18%, purely from printing additional notes to meet demand. ”

With so much cash in circulation, retailers are constantly being challenged to move away from manual cash handling with its labour intensive, costly and inefficient processes. According to Van der Westhuizen, more than half of South Africa’s retailers still use manual processes to manage their cash in-store, so the onus is on service providers to come up with more effective and efficient cash automation solutions.

Image courtesy of MF3d/Getty Images\_techcrunch.com



## Cash management best practice

### Reduce cash on-site

Whether you are already invested in automated cash management, or manually managing your cash handling, the safest place for cash is still in the business’ bank account. Setting a limit on how much money is allowed in the store will help minimise the amount of cash you keep on site. The faster your store’s cash is deposited, the quicker you reduce risk.

### Focus on security

Moving cash in South Africa should be left to the professionals. It is not safe for an employee or store owner to transport large amounts of cash. Even with armoured vehicles and armed guards, incidents of cash-in-transit crime in South Africa are among the highest in the world.

According to the latest crime statistics, serious crimes like in-store robberies and cash-in-transit heists increased more than 10% in the three months between October and December 2022 compared to the same period last year. Employee theft is also rampant. It is estimated that 5-7% of turnover is lost to internal theft. All staff that handle cash must undergo background checks, and there should be a clear separation of duties to create accountability through the cash management process.

## Implement systems and procedures

Systems and procedures provide a foundation for proper cash management. Cash handling is part of your store’s internal controls, and it is essential that your employees are trained to understand your specific policies.



Image courtesy of huffingtonpost.co.uk

## Cash management technology

While it’s prudent to minimise the amount of cash you keep in-store, you still need to ensure there is enough cash on hand to run your business, facilitate smooth transactions, and give your customers an easy way to access their cash in order to trade with you.

One of the latest trends in the cash handling and security industry is the adoption of in-store cash recycling devices. At their most sophisticated, these devices perform multiple functions that previously required manual intervention, including accepting cash, dispensing cash, counting cash (both notes and coins), and allocating cash floats. Wanda Kelly, Head of Sales and Marketing at South African



## Mercury EK-2100



# Built to Fit In and Get Down to Business

The Mercury EK-2100 Series is a 21.5" interactive kiosk with a stylish, compact, and functional design that helps retailers implement contactless, safe, efficient, and reliable service to the customers.



NFC/RFID Reader



Fingerprint Sensor



2D Scanner



Status Indicator



EMV Supportive\*



Power Safety

\*Posiflex does not sell the EMV payment devices, but can provide bracket support with an additional charge

## Ingenious Design

With the choice of floor-standing or countertop, the Mercury EK-2100 Series ensures flexibility to meet the needs in any retail setting.

## Easy Serviceability

Engineered for easy assembly and maintenance, Mercury EK-2100 Series lets retailers assemble and switch out components easily.

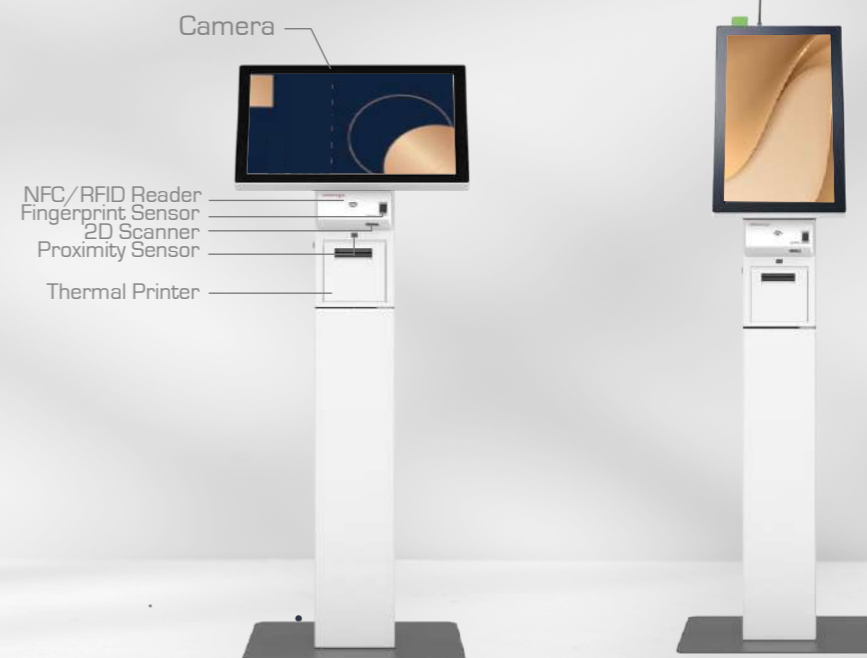
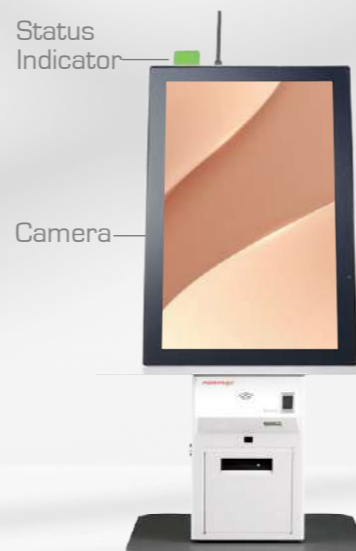
## Seamless Integration

Mercury EK-2100 Series offers a flexible solution with a variety of choices of peripherals including a Fingerprint sensor, an NFC/RFID reader, a 2D scanner, and a bracket for EMV payment devices.

# PRODUCT SHOWCASE



COUNTERTOP



FLOOR-STANDING

cash protection and management equipment manufacturer Allcash, says that while cash recycling is catching on faster overseas, particularly in Europe, the technology is starting to feature in South African retail too.

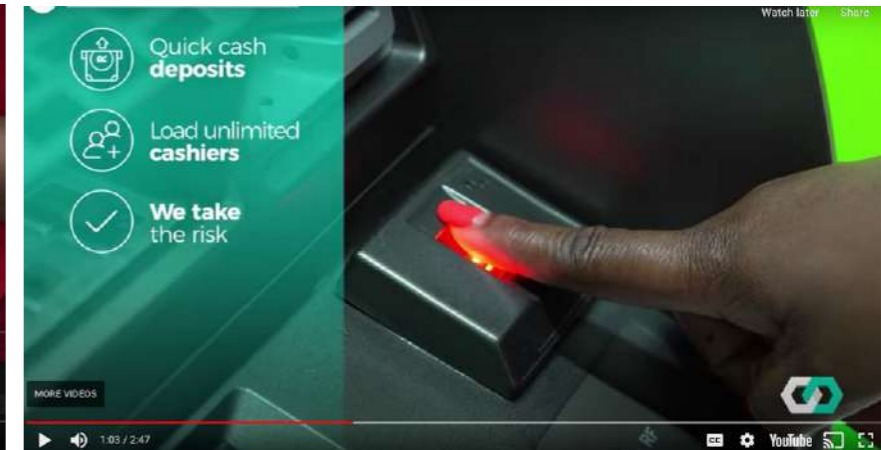
“We have several local clients, specifically in the retail pharmaceutical, fast food and hospitality industries, that have already deployed some form of cash recycling equipment in-store and on-premises and are in active talks with larger supermarkets for recycling solutions that would augment their existing automated cash management systems,” says Kelly, explaining that there are two types of recycling devices retailers should consider: till point and back office.

“One of our large national hardware retail customers recently installed till point recyclers that virtually eliminate any human touchpoints,” she says. “Cash is paid directly into the device instead of the till drawer, and change is dispensed by the device as well. The teller doesn’t touch the cash at any point, and the device is also able to process card transactions for customer cash withdrawals, again without any teller intervention.

“We’ve also installed back-office recyclers at one of South Africa’s largest fast-food chains, which has completely transformed the group’s end-of-day and start-of-day cash acceptance and dispensation processes,” says Kelly.

“Once a service cashier has finished their shift, they take their daily cash earnings, deposit them into the device, and go home. At the start of the day, new cashiers are allocated their daily floats

Images courtesy of Cash Connect



by the device, which dispenses the right amount in predetermined denominations and coins. The process repeats at the end of the shift.”

Deposita’s Peter van der Westhuizen agrees that self-service cash recycling is the next logical step in the evolution of in-store cash management.

“As a company we provide the full gamut of deposit solutions, including semi- or full self-service recycling solutions for retail environments,” he says. “One of the biggest benefits of the technology, for me, is the change it makes to previously tedious – and often dangerous – manual cash handling processes. Not only does staff no longer need to physically handle cash, or at least not as often, it also reduces the need for after-hours cash recon, so staff that have often been on their feet all day can simply deposit their floats and go home.”

Van der Westhuizen points to recent studies reflecting that 80% of consumers want retailers to provide a payment option choice during checkout and do not want to be forced to pay through a dedicated payment rail like ‘card only’. “Interestingly, 47% of consumers will not always choose the same payment option but select the payment option that best meets their needs at that moment in time,” he adds.

A more advanced form of cash recycling is the intelligent ATM Recycler. Cash Connect’s Templemore-Walters says an intelligent retail ATM Recycler offers a three-way cash management solution: a cash vault, a smart retail ATM recycler and a dispenser, as an all-in-one offering.

“It’s ideal for retailers with a cash-centric client base that want to pay for goods in cash and use

the in-store ATM to make cash withdrawals,” he says. “It also offers a further enhancement of in-store cash recycling, which results in fewer cash-in-transit collections, reduced cash processing fees, and ultimately translates into a cost-saving for the retailer.”

One of the critical components of next-generation cash and ATM recycling is biometric security.

“Biometric authentication at the cash touchpoint enables cashiers to cash-and-dash, which allows for quick and seamless cash deposits by cashiers and increases accountability among staff when making cash deposits and drops,” says Templemore-Walters.

“I would encourage any retailer currently investigating these solutions to strongly consider biometrics as part of the spec, in place of cards or fobs that can easily go missing or be stolen.”

## An automated future

Both cash recyclers and more advanced all-in-one ATM recyclers are part of a broader move towards streamlined automated cash management, the benefits of which are threefold:

- **Operational efficiency:** Automated cash management eliminates manual reconciliations and banking. This helps ensure fast cash management, while reducing shrinkage, overhead and back-office costs. It also means admin staff and supervisors have more time to focus on work that adds more value to the business. Automated systems can quickly and accurately count cash, validate

Images courtesy of Deposita



currency authenticity, and reconcile cash amounts. This eliminates the need for manual counting and reduces the time spent on cash-related tasks, enabling employees to focus on other essential aspects of customer service and store operations. Moreover, automated cash management systems can generate comprehensive reports and analytics, providing valuable insights into cash flow, which can inform decision-making and optimise cash management strategies.

- **Better cashflow:** An effective automated cash management system will reflect the retailer’s cash in their bank account on the same day that the cash-in-transit company collects it from their premises. Some solutions even offer instant access

to cash while it’s still in the vault, converting the retailer’s cash into value whenever they need it. Cash is a valuable asset, and optimising its handling is crucial for retailers’ financial health.

Automated systems facilitate timely and accurate cash reconciliation, reducing discrepancies and ensuring that cash is properly accounted for. This enables retailers to have a real-time view of their cash position, aiding in better decision-making regarding cash allocation, banking, and cash replenishment. Effective cash flow management can help retailers avoid cash shortages, minimise the cost of cash handling, and optimise their overall financial operations.

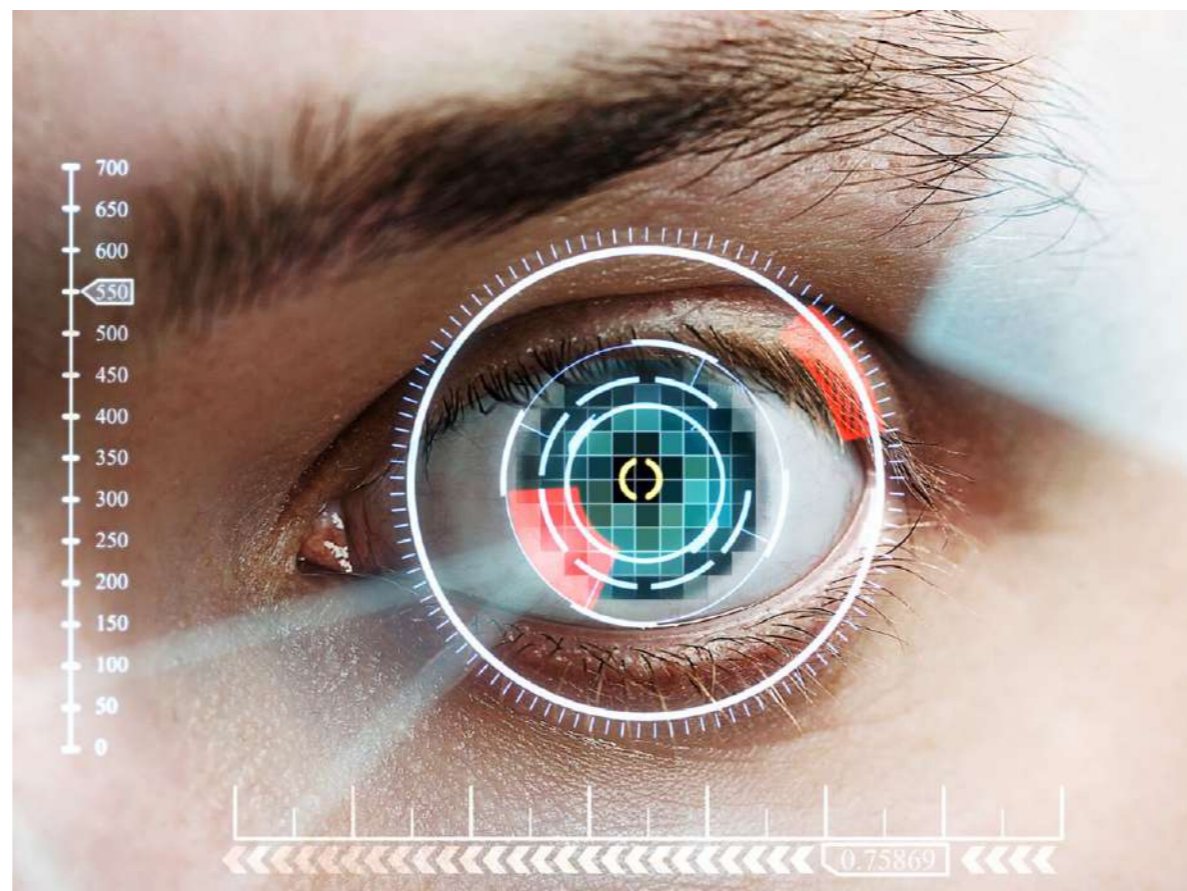
- **Maximum value:** Cash transactions still play a vital role in many businesses, particularly for smaller retailers that cater to customers who prefer using cash. Automating cash processes helps retailers handle these transactions efficiently and accurately, reducing wait times for customers and enhancing their overall experience. By providing a seamless and convenient cash payment experience, retailers can attract and retain customers who prefer or rely on cash transactions, thus maximising sales opportunities.

Ultimately, the most important function of automated cash management systems is to secure your cash at every stage, from customer, to till, to vault, to bank or, as we've already seen, throughout the in-store cash recycling process.

The best solutions will employ secure technology, such as note and coin validators, counterfeit detection mechanisms, and cash tracking software, to ensure accuracy and security throughout the entire cash management cycle. This greatly reduces the chances of human error or intentional misconduct, promoting a safe and secure working environment for employees and protecting the retailer's bottom line.

## Cash in a cashless future

With the proliferation of digital payment platforms and the increasing popularity of mobile wallets, it's easy to envision a future where physical cash becomes obsolete. However, the reality is that cash will remain a part of our economy for many years



to come. The role and continued benefits of cash should not be overlooked.

Cash has long served as a universal form of payment, accepted by merchants and individuals across the globe. Its tangible nature provides a sense of security and autonomy, allowing individuals to maintain control over their finances without relying on intermediaries. In a cashless future, there may be concerns about privacy and data security, as every transaction would leave a digital footprint. Cash, on the other hand, offers a level of anonymity that many people value.

Additionally, cash is accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status or technological literacy. Not everyone has access to digital payment methods or the means to use them effectively.

This is particularly relevant in a country like South Africa, where infrastructural challenges like load shedding are widening the digital divide between the haves and have-nots.

In a cashless society, these individuals could potentially be marginalised and excluded from participating fully in economic transactions. Cash ensures inclusivity, serving as a reliable medium of exchange for those who might otherwise be left behind. That said ...

“Cash in a cashless future will demand even better cash management technology, security, and best practice. It is essential that retailers are fully prepared.”

SR



Guy Lerner, writer and photographer, writes across diverse topics in business, technology, and retail, including consumer technology, telecommunications software, user experience technology, security, and power systems. He has worked with multinational companies in South Africa and Australia and is currently based in Cape Town. Guy holds a B.Sc. Honours degree from the University of Witwatersrand). Contact Wilkins Ross Communications

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# BIG DATA for BIG IMPACT in SA's Main Consumer Market



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# Using **BIG DATA** for **BIG IMPACT** in SA's Main Consumer Market



Great marketing is an art, but big data has introduced a scientific element to marketing campaigns and smart marketers are relying on data more and more to inform, test and develop their approach. While data and analytics will never replace the creative minds behind the most inspiring campaigns, they do provide marketers with the precision tools to hone their strategies and brand positioning.

Big data analytics is now being applied at every step of the retail process: from predicting popular products to identifying the customers who are likely to be interested in these products and what to sell them next. Consumers, in turn, expect a certain amount of guided selling. They want to know about products that interest and appeal specifically to them, and they are used to being presented with products and promotions uniquely tailored to their preferences and habits. Catering to that individuality has been proven to increase revenue, customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

This is especially true for big data collected from customer loyalty and rewards programmes, as it yields unsurpassed insights by providing a detailed, comprehensive picture of a customer, including their likes and dislikes, gender and location, their social media presence, their preference for being rewarded, and much more. These insights are invaluable for brands that seek to increase revenue, improve the customer experience and shape their brands for the future.

A case in point in the South African context is Retail Engage, a division of the Akelo Group, which owns and operates one of the largest 'main market' shopper rewards programmes called bonsella. Targeting more than 10 million consumers, bonsella enables brands to connect with a large proportion of the economically active main market consumer base in South Africa.

Head of Retail Engage, Stuart Hoy says, 'The main market comprises the majority market, or the 'base of the pyramid', making up a significant portion of consumer FMCG spend. Comprising of LSM's 3 to 7, this market moves between formal and informal retail spaces shopping for value,

convenience and trust. Brands find it challenging to communicate with this market because of the lack of measurable media and communication platforms available. But by connecting retailers, shoppers and brands and providing instant gratification rewards – instant airtime to their mobile phones – for purchases of goods on promotion, bonsella delivers more value on the purchase, which is a vital motivator for this portion of the market. In addition, participating retailers benefit from increased footfall and products on campaign to attract more spend in store'

Hoy says that, now more than ever, this consumer is looking for added value and tangible rewards in real-time. 'We have seen a shift in the needle for as little as 10% of the value of the product and we regularly undertake research to ensure that our understanding of what motivates this market is relevant at all times.'

An example of how this system can drive brand awareness, sales and loyalty is a recent hair product promotion that yielded a 210%-plus increase in sales over the three-month campaign period. More importantly, though, Retail Engage was able to provide the brand with in-depth analysis of who these shoppers are and what do their baskets consist of. The client then applied customer analytics to uncover, interpret and act on these meaningful data insights.

'Because of our immersion and the level of trust we've established in this market, we also regularly undertake market research for our stores and clients, which leads to enhanced understanding of their target audience and how to market their brand,' says Hoy.

Based on the 10 years of experience that Retail Engage has had in this market, Hoy shares some nuggets of advice to guide brands seeking to target South Africa's main market customer:

- **Sometimes less is more**

High volumes bring with them higher costs of sale and less visibility, as shelf space is in higher demand and there is more 'noise'. There are better gains to be had in

focused areas that may not offer as high density but provide the advantages of loyalty and engagement.

- **Shopper engagement and point of sale are key influences**

Main market consumers generally place more trust in traditional advertising. This is a great opportunity for brands to leverage in-person activations and instore displays to reinforce the brand message and convert shoppers to buyers.

- **Tailor price points and promotions for each retail channel**

Shopper purpose and frequency by channel can vary widely, so understanding shopper behaviour is key in determining the correct pack size, price point and promotion for a spaza shop versus a hypermarket or a wholesaler.

- **Great experiences**

Main market consumers are more likely to talk about their experiences – both positive and negative. Winning them over is more likely to result in a brand being advocated across social media platforms and in person.

- **It's not the amount of data that matters but the way an organisation uses it**

While promotions provide significant short-term gains in sales, the real winners in this market are those brands that use the data they glean from their promotions to further build brand awareness, trust and loyalty among their target audiences.

For greater insight into South Africa's main market and how to reach these consumers through targeted, cost-effective campaigns please visit [www.bonsella.com](http://www.bonsella.com) | [stuart@retailengage.co.za](mailto:stuart@retailengage.co.za)

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# Edeka – Netto Marken Discount format in Germany

“Where the format was born, now the aim is to manage its state of maturity with technological efficiency and environmental responsibility.”

Germany, the homeland of the discount store, is characterised by its high commercial density and evident lack of attractive locations – in this saturated context, the response of Edeka, the renowned company at the head of the Bavarian Netto Marken-Discount, was therefore based on the basic aspects of modernisation, conversions and extensions of the existing outlets. This process was incorporated into two major components, namely, a commitment to eco-sustainable construction and technological innovation.

Netto Marken-Discount offers a comprehensive local supply nationwide with a selected mix of branded and private label items, regional products and reusable packaging drinks at discount prices. Week after week, more than 21 million customers shop in 4 304 branches nationwide, served by 84 000 employees. With a turnover of 15.8 billion euros (2022), the subsidiary of Edeka-Zentrale is one of the Top 3 in the German food discount market.

With more than 5 000 products, Netto offers the widest range of products among all food discounters in Germany. The focus is on fresh food such as fruit, vegetables, self-service meat and sausage products, dairy products and bread and baked goods. Another focus is on localised regional origin.



External view of a Netto Marken, where the displays are smaller and more rationalised than the stores of the parent company Edeka.

## How was it done?

Among the most important innovations adopted by Netto, the 'recognition technology' stands out (in fruit and vegetables, with bulk references automatically recognised by a special photometric system) and

the 'self scanning' used with the smartphones of the same customers (Pick & Go Technology).

Recognition Technology is a system that uses artificial intelligence and vision to identify fresh products: this technological device saves time





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in the usual operations of recognition and handling at checkouts, prevents theft and reduces the need to wrap and label individual fruit and vegetables. This technology results in great time savings for both the Netto staff and the consumers.

With the opening of the Pick & Go branch in Munich-Schwabing, Netto Marken-Discount was the first discounter worldwide to make autonomous shopping possible without checkout processes or item scanning. When entering the branch, customers simply check in using a QR code. They then place the products they want directly in their own shopping bag. After scanning the QR code again, they leave the branch through an express exit. The purchase amount is automatically paid using the payment method stored in the net app.

This pilot project was made possible by sensors and mini-PCs on the shelves and in the ceiling. The removed products are recorded and assigned to the respective customers. With this pilot project, Netto Marken-Discount is accommodating all those customers who want a faster and more modern shopping experience. The hybrid concept of the Munich innovation branch also made it possible for less smartphone-savvy customers to shop at the checkout as usual.

Image courtesies of Ronald Rampsch, cio.de



Image courtesy of Philipp Klöckner, Netto



Above: Image courtesy of Philipp Klöckner, Netto.  
Below: Eziz Nurmuhamedov, Netto Marken-Discount

## What makes Edeka different?



The German discount retailer has set its own future by detaching itself from quantitative imitation (detrimental to healthy and lasting growth) and finalising all its potential in the qualitative exclusivity of efficiency projects.

In addition to this, it has made a public commitment towards eco-sustainable conduct and energy savings. Edeka has come up with a transparent commercial proposal, based on four

“ Netto Marken-Discount was the first discounter worldwide to make autonomous shopping possible without checkout processes or item scanning. When entering the branch, customers simply check in using a QR code. ”

Image courtesy of Marc Stemerding, Netto Marken-Discount



symbols and wordings (since June 2021) on the products displayed on the shelf, so as to highlight, despite any commercial risk, a reliable level of compatibility with the sensitive issue of respect towards the environment.



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The phrases that accompany the products on the counters read as follows ...

- For greater biodiversity
- For greater asset protection
- For better protection of water resources
- For better climate protection.

Netto Marken-Discount provides qualified and customer-oriented local supply throughout Germany. The company also knows how to set trends in terms of sustainability: when it comes to drinks, Netto has the largest environmentally friendly reusable range of all German discounters. In addition, the company is one of the most important retailers of organic food in Germany and is constantly expanding its regional product range.

Their own brand, BioBio, plays an important role in the Netto product range. Based on current customer trends, Netto is continuously revising its BioBio range and thus strengthening its food expertise.

Netto Marken-Discount also supports many local farms throughout Germany on a permanent basis. The food discounter has been committed to a more sustainable product range since 2008. All products in the range are sold with a surcharge of 10 cents. This donation allowance is distributed without deductions to the participating farmers in Germany. With the purchase of an item from this range, Netto customers have the opportunity to support local agriculture together with Netto Marken-Discount.



Image courtesy of de.foursquare.com

Image courtesy of Kevin B. Netto

Sustainability and acceptance of responsibility are part of the lived Netto corporate culture.

Netto Marken-Discount has been involved in numerous initiatives over the years ...

- Since 2012, Netto has been a partner of the "RTL Foundation – We Help Children" and supports national and international children's aid projects with customer and corporate donations.

- Since 2015, as part of its partnership with the WWF, Netto has been committed to sustainability, environmental protection and resource conservation in order to further reduce its own ecological footprint.

- Netto donation initiative: Netto works with its customers to help socially disadvantaged children in Germany. With the Netto donation

initiative, Netto enables its customers to support various aid organisations over the course of the year with their rounded-up cash amounts and deposit vouchers. With the words "simply round up" the purchase sum is increased to the next 10 cent amount during the payment process at the tills and the difference is donated to the donation partner. Netto also gives its customers the opportunity to support the social project with their bottle deposit.

- With the popular Tabaluga product range, Netto offers its customers a strong, varied range for kids: from crunchy fruit and vegetables to fruity drinks and child-friendly drugstore items. Netto supports the Peter Maffay Foundation from part of the proceeds from the Tabaluga exclusive brand products.

Image courtesy of Netto Marken-Discount



Image courtesy of Ingo Hilger, lebensmittelpraxis.de



Image courtesy of Marc Stemerding, Netto Marken-Discount



Image courtesy of de.foursquare.com

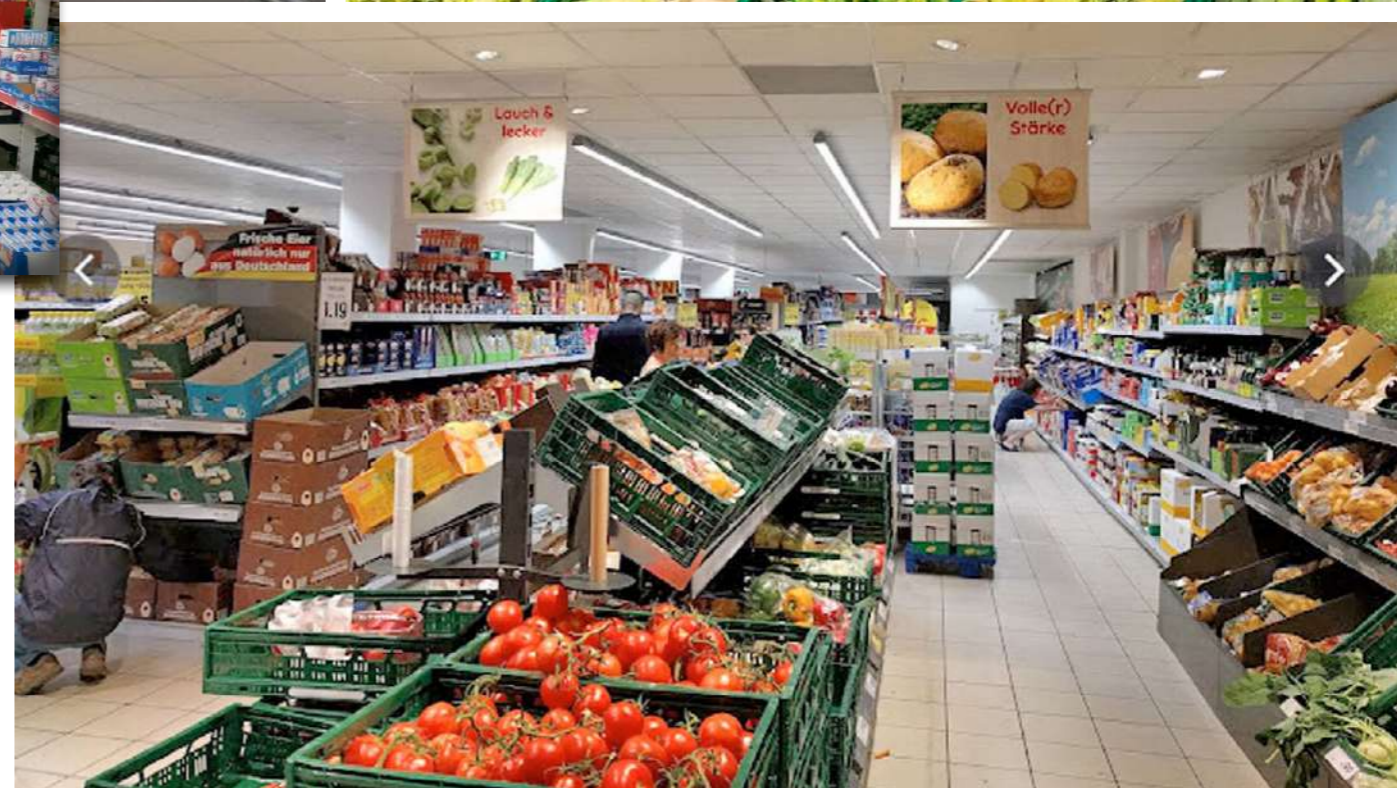


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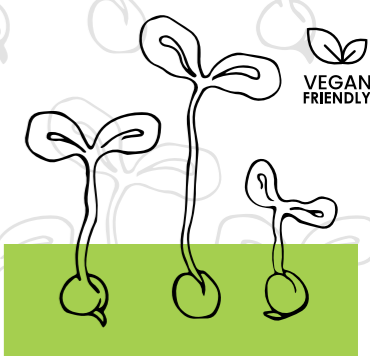


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Management's commitment



**Claas Meineke**, member of the Executive Board as well as Director of Sales & Marketing at Edeka Zentrale, declares with in the annual report the firm's ambition ...

"We want customers to follow us on our journey, we intend to generate enthusiasm for 'sustainable consumption' across all channels."

On the corporate strategy, he then adds the determination to profitably reconcile 'digital transformation' and 'core business'.

"It is now necessary to do so, promoting those ideas that increase the level of digitisation in our way of distributing, constantly reviewing the way we do things. Very significant examples are solutions such as those already adopted in 'loyalty' programs (Edeka App) and those related to the technologies now in use at checkout barriers."

As for the delicate issue of social responsibility, Meineke is even clearer ... "The Edeka Group is an integral part of society, therefore it strongly wishes it to be clean. All this faithfully reflects the corporate DNA. After all, all this is very evident in the 'design' of the products, in the choice of 'locations', in the infrastructures and above all in the contribution to social cohesion made by the cooperative of independent entrepreneurs which is under the umbrella of Edeka."



**Markus Mosa**, between 2001 and 2007, was Chief Executive Officer of Netto Marken Discount (a brand that has been part of Edeka since 2005); the manager now holds the important role of Chairman of the Board

of Directors in Edeka Zentrale, but has always a particular regard for Netto and his connection with Edeka.

"Our creed (both in Edeka and in Netto) consists in seizing opportunities, expressing potential, focusing on 'strengths' and above all thinking about things in new ways. This is how we have continued to grow, even during the pandemic."

Mosa goes further and mentions the main 'fear' of these times, the one that risks halting the continuation of growth – inflation.

"The inflation phenomenon is forcing many people to weigh every penny, which is why it becomes extremely dangerous when the industry tries to ride the wave with the aim of maximising profits. As distributors, we take the role of 'consumer advocates' very seriously, with particular regard to the concept of 'proportionality' – food cannot be allowed to become a luxury good!"

Exclusivity inspired by technology and the courage to apply certain innovations and a moderate approach to managing the price race, according to a responsibly respectful environment are the main ingredients, identified by this German brand, to face the future of the discount store. **SR**



Image courtesy of verbund.edeka

Edeka and Netto have partnered with Apeel before, previously launching Apeel's avocados at selected stores at the end of 2019. Oranges and clementines were the next fruits to follow the avocado pilot project. In the future, Apeel's plant-based protective coating will ensure longer-lasting freshness of Edeka World Wildlife Fund oranges and clementines.



With currently more than 400 BioBio articles, Netto is one of the largest organic retailers in Germany and enables certified organic enjoyment regardless of the available household budget.

Image courtesy of m.andnowuknow.com



**Hippo Zourides**, serial entrepreneur and corporate leader, has been involved in the food trade for over four decades and consults to corporates, large, medium and small enterprises on a variety of management and restructuring skills, including the latest ESG requirements.



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# Winter health Nothing to sneeze at

It has been a tough twelve months in the health sector. Common viruses have been unseasonably active and particularly harsh, even through the summer months.

As winter approaches, retailers and manufacturers should ready themselves to support the consumer's ongoing need for off-the-shelf winter remedies, cold and flu symptom alleviators, immune boosting supplements and alternative treatments. Good nutrition is also key for winter wellness. This means your entire store can participate in the Winter Health category.

## Healthy food – immune boosting nutrition is on the rise globally and locally

“ One of the basics of good winter health is good nutrition.

Foods that offer high nutritional value and have either immune boosting or cold and flu fighting benefits are ideal for marketing and promotions now. ”

Nourishing soups, and stews packed with carrots, broccoli, kale, peppers, onion, garlic, turmeric, and ginger will provide plenty of warming nutrition, while seasonal winter fruit and vegetables and fresh juices are great sources of vitamins. In the UK, the Daily Mail reports that tinned fish, particularly



Image courtesy of Victoria Rain, Pexels

flavoured tuna, as well as sardines and mackerel are becoming increasingly popular with consumers looking for healthy yet more affordable animal-based protein options.

## Take a multi-pronged approach and involve your entire store in keeping your shoppers healthy this winter

These same consumers are also embracing vegetable-based pastas such zucchini, sweet potato, and squash. South African consumers are starting to learn that adding lean proteins as well as a rainbow of fruits and vegetables to their diet is one of the best ways to prevent colds and flu from taking hold this winter. You can inspire your customers to stay healthy with a selection of healthy winter recipe ideas on your social media channels.

## Supplements: vitamins, minerals, probiotics & other health boosters

Shoppers now expect a range of health offerings from their favourite stores, from superfood powders and shakes to immune boosters, antioxidants, and daily multivitamins. For winter, think vitamins B, C and D and zinc for stronger immune systems, calcium for absorption, and Omega 3 to keep hair and skin healthier in drier/colder winter months.



Vitamin C also improves blood flow and helps to regulate body temperature. Probiotics contribute to a healthy immune system, while echinacea, garlic and ginseng help to prevent or treat colds and flu. Consumers also use green, herbal, and fortified teas for their health benefits, as well as herbal, holistic and natural remedies.

## OTC Medication – Schedule 0, Complementary, and Alternative Medicine

### The South African market – an overview

OTC or off the shelf medication for fighting the symptoms of common colds and flu include tried and trusted analgesics and antipyretics, as well as treatment for dehydration, nausea, congestion, and sore throats. Your choice of arsenal here is huge, so selecting an appropriate range based on accurate sales data analysis is crucial.

In a recent report by ResearchAndMarkets.com, it was reported that “Drug stores and pharmacies [are] the leading channels in the distribution of OTC healthcare in the country.”

Convenience stores, and hypermarkets and supermarkets were named as the next two most common channels, while Pharma Natura (Pty) Ltd, Weleda Ag, and Reckitt Benckiser Group plc were named by the report as the top three companies in the South African OTC healthcare sector. It is important to note that Pharma Natura produces solely homeopathic remedies – an interesting picture of the local market can be inferred when looking at the company’s success.



Image courtesy of Nataliya Vaitkevich, Pexels

Supporting this is a GlobalData report, which states, “The South Africa over-the-counter (OTC) healthcare market size was valued at \$633.4 million in the year 2021. The market is expected to grow at a CAGR of more than 3% during the forecast period. The South Africa OTC healthcare market report provides insights on high growth markets to target, trends in the usage of category level distribution data and companies market shares.”

The report goes on to add that the leading categories in OTC are traditional medicines, cough and cold preparations (including antihistamines), first aid kits, indigestion preparations, and medicated skin products.

### Traditional medicines lead the way for local consumers

According to ResearchAndMarkets.com, “The South African OTC healthcare sector [was] led by the traditional medicines category in value terms in 2021.” However, while ResearchAndMarkets.com also forecast that the topical OTC medicines category would register the fastest value growth during 2021-2026, GlobalData predicted that traditional medicines would have that honour. Suffice to say, it’s a category that could offer significant opportunities to retailers agile enough to think outside the box.

### OTC on the rise as South Africans reach for affordable at-home treatment

The cost of healthcare is rising, and South Africans are becoming more health-conscious and health-savvy. Instead of heading to the GP at the first sign of a cough or cold, they are more likely than ever to take matters into their own hands and treat at home first. Analysts agree that consumer preference for OTC medication in the cough, cold, and flu remedies market is growing at a consistent rate. It’s easily available, often more cost-effective than prescribed medication, and consumers can stock up on their preferred treatment combinations ahead of the winter flu season.



Image courtesy of Pixabay, Pexels

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) sent out an alert in mid-March 2023 stating that RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) season had started, and detections are increasing steeply already. The cold and flu season is likely to follow suit. In response, retailers can expect to see a sharp rise in both OTC sales, as well as an increased interest in immune-boosting, cold-fighting supplements, foods, teas, and other holistic treatments and prophylactics.

**Home delivery services & e-commerce drive OTC growth**

In an Insight Survey article published on Bizcommunity last year, it was noted that “Dis-Chem’s online sales have surged, now comprising 18.1% of the company’s sales for the six months ended August 2021. In response, the Dis-Chem group deployed 44 new e-commerce hubs and increased investment in its e-commerce platform. Furthermore, the launch of home delivery services, such as PharmaGo and Dis-Chem’s Deliver D, offer a convenient means of obtaining cough, cold and flu remedies, further supporting the preference for at-home treatment in the local market.”



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Home products like humidifiers and air purifiers are part of the care-at-home set-up. Nebulisers are becoming more common place as upper respiratory infections become more virulent. In addition to medical equipment and products that provide healthcare support, hygiene and sanitation are critical. Covid-19 taught consumers the importance of preventing the spread of disease, so expect an uptick in sales of hand sanitisers, soaps, and other personal and household cleaning materials.

**Affordable, effective winter health care**

South Africans are struggling to afford professional healthcare and are relying more and more on themselves, and their supermarkets or health and wellness outlets. Affordable, accessible, and easy-to-use medications are essentials this winter. In the same vein, prevention is now more important than ever, and shoppers are more knowledgeable when it comes to healthy eating, supplementation, and general wellness. Expect them to act on it. **SR**

**Sources:**

Dietitians share the five food trends set to be big in 2023 | Daily Mail Online  
 South Africa Over-the-Counter (OTC) Healthcare Market Forecast to 2026: OTC Healthcare Sector Forecast to Register CAGR of 36% during 2021-2026  
 South Africa Over-the-Counter (OTC) Healthcare Market Size by Categories, Distribution Channel, Market Share and Forecast, 2021-2026



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# Instant coffee still South Africa's favourite

The latest findings from Bmi Research's March 2023 coffee report show that the coffee industry has continued to perform positively since 2020, when volumes dropped due to the lockdowns meant to curb the spread of Covid-19.

The report profiles research that was conducted by Bmi Research between January and December 2022, ahead of the final field work and report compilation in March 2023.

Although the category experienced volume growth from 2021 to 2022, the report reveals that overall category volume has not reached the volume achieved in 2019.

Instant coffee is the star of the category, with year-on-year growth that has not been affected by lockdowns. Ground coffee, which is mainly sold to restaurants, has not recovered yet. Sales of ground coffee at retail outlets has remained under pressure, as consumers have opted for lower priced instant coffee alternatives.

Instant coffee is predominantly used at home or in offices as it can be prepared without specialised equipment, like coffee machines or pots. During the various lockdowns and in the months following those periods, South Africans were working from home more and going out less. This translated into greater volumes of instant coffee being consumed. Preparing a cup of coffee at home is also much cheaper than purchasing a cup of coffee for many cash-strapped South Africans.

There has been an increase in imported instant coffee brands being sold in South Africa. These brands are generally sold at a lower price when compared to local brands and are starting to impact the category shares of local players.



Image courtesy of Olga Mironova, Pexels

This trend is expected to continue in the short term, as food and beverage inflation reaches its highest level in decades. Consumers are struggling to make ends meet due to shrinking disposable



Image courtesy of Peter, Pexels

income and a rise in inflation locally and globally, prioritising staple food over luxury goods – the category into which coffee falls. Price is a significant determinant factor when consumers purchase coffee.

Specialty coffee has seen a minimal increase since 2021, driven by ready-to-drink (canned or iced) coffee. Premix coffee, which was the fastest growing segment before the pandemic, has experienced minimal recovery. This product is seen as a treat and purchased mostly when discounted or on promotion. It is also commonly used in the office, as it provides one serving per sachet. However, this is also seen as one of the most expensive 'cup per serving' products on the market.

The coffee industry is expected to continue with its recovery trajectory, although at a lower rate than previously expected as a result of changing consumer behaviour and restrictive economic conditions. **SR**

# Strict new driving rules for South Africa on shaky ground



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in BusinessTech  
8 May 2023

By Gavin Kelly  
CEO: The Road Freight Association

Gavin Kelly, RFA CEO

The future of the Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offences (AARTO) – from a Constitutional point of view – awaits the consideration and judgement from the Constitutional Court, where the matter was heard in November 2022. The Court reserved judgement, and there are indications that the judgement should be handed down before the end of May 2023.

Whilst this is awaited, the Road Traffic Infringement Authority (RTIA) has been at pains to make it clear that it will continue with the preparatory tasks required for a national roll-out – looking at full implementation across the country within three years of the initial roll-out phases.

The Road Freight Association (RFA) has interacted with both the Department of Transport (DoT) and the Road Traffic Infringement Agency (RTIA) since the first publication of the draft AARTO Act and the resulting regulations, dating back to 1997. We have placed on record that, despite well- substantiated motivation for serious adjustment to both the manner of implementation of a demerit system, as well as the ability for law-abiding citizens to access and manage their proposed demerit points, the Department has



Image courtesy of Gabriel Hohol, Pexels

not amended the regulations in any way to ensure that the compliance costs do not become a serious burden on law-abiding citizens – whether fleet operators or individuals.

In addition, the RFA has noted that the issuing of points to vehicles is unfounded; will have a serious impact on the vehicle supply sector (both new and used); the sustainability of fleets and individuals with regard to personal transport needs (there is no reliable, efficient, safe and affordable public transport system available in the country); and not have the effective and sustainable behavioural change required to improve road traffic legislative compliance.

The article is factually incorrect. The source of the article is unknown to the RFA and this may be bad reporting, incorrect interpretation or – indeed – incorrect statement of the facts.

Drivers will commence with ZERO points (not 15 as stated in the article) and will 'earn' demerit points as and when applicable through the AARTO process, where demerit points are allocated. Currently the threshold is a maximum of 12 points (the proposed amendment recommends 15 points) whereupon – from point 13 – the various sanctions of suspension or cancellation of a driving licence will occur, as defined in the AARTO legislation.

There are numerous challenges: the scourge of corruption and poor traffic policing have not been addressed nor resolved, neither has the process to ensure that manipulation of the system through





Image: Taras Makarenko, Pexels

targeting of certain fleet operators (or individuals) can be prevented.

In addition, the proposed Tribunal System has a number of flaws that leave prospective procedural queries hanging, and the whole rehabilitation programme has more queries than answers, there are numerous charges relating to taxis that carry no demerit points and the addition

of extra levies to cover administration processes point to revenue generation.

The process of addressing the comments received from the last round of public comment has not been completed – a final proposal relating to the proposed regulations was not completed before the current impasse was created through the legal process (which now awaits the decision from the Constitutional Court).

The RFA trusts that, once the Constitutional Court has handed down its judgement (either way), that the Department of Transport and the RTIA will carefully consider and apply the comments from all parties that submitted comment and take special note of the comments from the Association

which cover the impact this legislation will have on fleet operators.

In its last iteration/form, the RFA is of the opinion that AARTO will not be implementable without the comments and proposals it tabled in 2019. The Association is aware that the RTIA has taken many of these into consideration, and that another draft of the proposed regulations is ready for public circulation – pending the judgement from the Constitutional Court.

It is crucial that a sustainable, fair, reliable and manageable system is introduced to change and improve road user behaviour, and that this does not become a huge financial millstone around the necks of compliant fleets (or individuals). **SR**



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# Humans and machines as co-workers in the workplace of the future



Yossi Sheffi

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The capacity for adaptability of human workers is set to become a vital component of the automated workplace of the future, contrary to widely-held assumptions about tech-driven changes.

Labour relations are in the spotlight with employers at Los Angeles and Long Beach ports, management teams at FedEx, and UPS engaged in critically important contract negotiations with trade union representatives. Any one of these talks has the potential to hurt the US economy should the negotiators fail to reach an agreement and protracted industrial action ensues.

## Human worker flexibility and automation

The talks cover a range of issues, but a key theme is flexibility. For example, UPS management wants more flexible work contracts that allow the company to flex with changing market conditions. Port employers want the flexibility to introduce more automation to remain competitive.

Image courtesy Somchai Kongkamsri, Pexels



The capacity for adaptability of human workers is set to become a vital component of the automated workplace of the future, contrary to widely-held assumptions about tech-driven changes.

Flexibility will become increasingly crucial in labour relations, but not how today's negotiators think. In the future – and contrary to popular assumptions about tech-driven change – the flexibility of human workers will play a critically important role in the automated workplace.

Yossi Sheffi's new book, *The Magic Conveyor Belt: Supply Chains, A.I., and the Future of Work*, lays out the arguments for such a future.

## Echoes from the past

Over the last 250 years, technological innovation has driven industrial revolutions that have brought transformative change to society in general and the workplace in particular. At the heart of these changes were fears that new technologies would eliminate jobs and bring mass unemployment. These fears stoked labour unrest and violent clashes.

The reality turned out to be far less dystopian. The tech advances that brought about dramatic change also created new employment opportunities. For example, despite the introduction of ATMs, the number of bank tellers in the US increased from about 300 000 in 1970 to 600 000 in 2010. This is because ATMs enabled banks to





operate with fewer tellers, opening more branches and creating more jobs.

We are now on the cusp of an industrial revolution driven by innovations such as artificial intelligence. Will this next wave of transformative change be different from previous ones?

In terms of its overall impact on jobs, the answer is no. Automation will create new employment opportunities as it did in the past. However, we don't know how these future job specs will be defined.

## The elements of flexibility

One feature of this unfolding employment landscape we can discern today is that human flexibility will be a valued component. Here are some examples of the flexibility that humans will bring to future workplaces.

## Real-world experience

A lifetime of experience in the physical world allows people to detect changes or discrepancies between normal and abnormal situations. For example, during the financial crisis of 2008, companies worried about the financial health of their suppliers. Many companies asked for economic data from suppliers, but these numbers could be manipulated and only provided a lagging, infrequently updated view of conditions at the supplier. To augment the data, companies sent people to spot-check critical suppliers' production of parts or materials on behalf of the company.

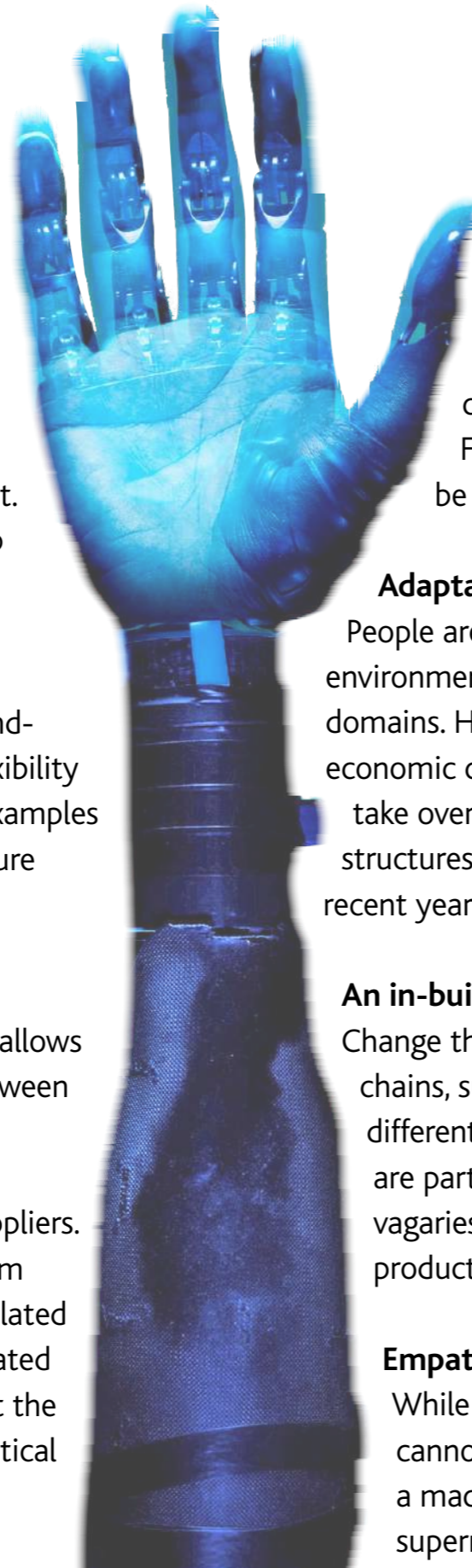


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## A moral perspective

Many work tasks involve value judgments and subjective elements based on the system designer's or manager's preferences. However, objectives, moral understandings, and preferences change over time. While machines may be able, if appropriately trained, to sift through large amounts of data and present options for actions, people may have to make the ultimate decisions in cases where the implications matter significantly. This is especially true when the context changes and decisions must be made in a different environment. For example, when prioritising the response to a disaster, should preference be given to customers, employees, suppliers, shareholders, or the community?

## Adaptability and coordination

People are more adaptable than robots when faced with unstructured conditions and environments. Robotic software systems are built and optimised for specific tasks or domains. However, change (disruptions, new knowledge, new products, competitors' actions, economic cycles, etc.) can render the machine's appropriateness moot, requiring a person to take over the task. Also, social networks are adept at creating new corporate organisational structures to manage change. This has happened in response to numerous disruptions over recent years, such as the 2011 earthquake in Japan and the Covid-19 pandemic.

## An in-built creative drive

Change that requires adaptation is built into many consumer and technology supply chains, such as fast fashion. These fast-moving supply chains search ceaselessly for differentiation that can spur demand for any new product or service. People, not machines, are part of a cultural milieu that stimulates creativity. Also, humans understand the vagaries of everyday life, and this hands-on experience creates possibilities for new products and services.

## Empathy and communication

While a growing number of AI applications are used in health care, computers cannot show the empathy required of a nurse while treating a patient. Likewise, a machine cannot replace the smile of a service worker, such as a cashier in a local supermarket. Similarly, few contract negotiations can be completed without both



sides understanding each other, developing rapport, and appreciating each other's points of view. Even though algorithms that mimic these qualities are becoming increasingly sophisticated, it isn't easy to imagine absolute acceptance of machine-generated, simulated emotions and empathy.

**Nuanced risk management**

While rules can be programmed based on different contexts, the most appropriate choice in a situation that requires a company to select a way forward may differ from the one suggested by the rules.

For example, if the company suspects that a recession is on the horizon, it may prefer the safer, rather than the high-risk, course of action.

Humans are used to taking such nuances into account when making decisions.

**Time to look to the future?**

Today's management teams and labour representatives can be forgiven for focusing on resolving current issues and avoiding highly damaging industrial actions. However, as automation continues to make inroads into the workplace, at some point, these parties must address how the future workplace will harness human flexibility. **SR**

Dr. Yossi Sheffi is a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he serves as Director of the Center for Transportation & Logistics.

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