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UK DRS GUIDE

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1. WHAT IS THE UK'S DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME (DRS)?

The UK's Deposit Return Scheme is designed to increase the collection of drinks containers and improve the quality of materials entering the recycling process. When purchasing an eligible beverage, consumers will pay a small deposit. This deposit is refunded when the empty container is returned through an approved collection point, such as a reverse vending machine (RVM).

The goal is not simply to collect more bottles and cans. It is to collect them separately, preserve material quality and enable high-value recycling, including bottle-to-bottle recycling for PET. For retailers, the DRS introduces new operational considerations. Collection equipment, available space, customer flows, logistics and maintenance all become part of the implementation process.

As the UK prepares for the scheme's rollout, many businesses are now moving beyond understanding the regulation itself and focusing on how to integrate DRS into their day-to-day operations.

2. AM I LEGALLY REQUIRED TO INSTALL A REVERSE VENDING MACHINE (RVM)?

Under the UK Deposit Return Scheme, obligated retailers will need to provide a return point for eligible containers unless they qualify for an exemption. While many larger retailers are expected to install Reverse Vending Machines, others may choose manual take-back depending on factors such as store size, return volumes and available space.

For many businesses, the decision is not simply about legal compliance. It is about finding the most efficient, customer-friendly and commercially beneficial way to manage container returns. Retailers should assess expected return volumes, operational impact and customer experience before deciding on the most appropriate solution.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet works with retailers to assess whether an automated or manual solution is most appropriate, recommending the right equipment based on store size, expected return volumes and operational requirements.

3. HOW MUCH SPACE DOES AN RVM ACTUALLY REQUIRE?

One of the most common misconceptions is that reverse vending machines require large amounts of floor space. In reality, the right solution depends on two variables: the number of containers expected each day and the available space inside or outside the store. Compact solutions can fit into smaller retail environments, while higher-capacity units are designed for supermarkets handling larger return volumes.

Choosing the correct size from the beginning helps optimise both collection efficiency and store operations.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet offers different RVM configurations for different retail layouts, from **compact solutions** for limited spaces to **higher-capacity units** for larger collection volumes. The range includes **indoor and outdoor models**, allowing retailers to choose the most suitable installation point without necessarily sacrificing valuable selling space.

4. HOW DO I CHOOSE THE RIGHT REVERSE VENDING MACHINE?

Selecting the right Reverse Vending Machine involves much more than choosing a particular model. Retailers should consider expected return volumes, available space, customer footfall, indoor or outdoor installation, maintenance requirements and future business growth.

A solution that works well for a convenience store may not be suitable for a supermarket, holiday park or transport hub. Choosing the correct machine from the outset helps reduce operating costs while ensuring a positive customer experience.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet offers a complete portfolio of indoor and outdoor Reverse Vending Machines, from compact units such as the R80 through to high-capacity outdoor recycling hubs. Our team works alongside customers to recommend the most suitable solution for every location.

5. HOW MUCH STORAGE SPACE DO I NEED FOR COLLECTED CONTAINERS?

One of the most common concerns when planning a DRS collection point is storage space. Retailers often assume that returned containers will quickly occupy valuable back-of-store space. In reality, the amount of storage required depends largely on how efficiently the material is compacted before collection.

The more containers can be compacted, the less storage space is needed between collections. High-compaction systems allow retailers to store significantly larger volumes within the same footprint, reducing both storage requirements and collection frequency. When evaluating a DRS solution, it's important to consider not only the size of the machine itself, but also how much material it can store before emptying is required. This has a direct impact on day-to-day operations, available warehouse space and logistics planning.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet's patented RiPress technology reduces PET volume by up to **90%**, storing **up to 6,000 bottles in just 1 m³**.

This allows retailers to minimise storage requirements, reduce collection frequency (and associated CO₂ emissions) and maintain operational flexibility, even during peak return periods.

6. WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH INDOOR SPACE?

Many retailers assume a RVM must be installed inside the store.

Today, outdoor installations are increasingly common, not only for supermarkets but also for forecourts, retail parks, holiday parks, transport hubs and local authorities. Weather-resistant units allow collection points to be installed in car parks, entrances and other external areas, preserving valuable indoor space while remaining easily accessible to customers. Modular product ranges also make it possible to choose different footprints depending on the available area.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Not every location has the same layout or operational requirements. Ripet offers both **indoor and outdoor RVM solutions**, suitable for supermarkets, forecourts, retail parks, holiday parks, transport hubs and public spaces. For locations where space is particularly limited, the **compact R80** provides an efficient solution without compromising collection capacity.

7. DOES OPERATING A RVM REQUIRE DEDICATED STAFF?

Modern reverse vending machines are designed for customer self-service. Consumers scan and return containers independently while the system automatically validates eligible packaging and manages the reward process. Store staff are not required to operate the machine during normal daily activity. This allows retailers to introduce DRS collection without adding operational workload.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet RVM are designed for autonomous customer use. Container recognition, validation and reward generation happen automatically, allowing retailers to introduce collection without dedicating staff to machine operation.

8. HOW MUCH MAINTENANCE IS ACTUALLY REQUIRED?

Maintenance requirements depend largely on how the machine has been designed. Well-engineered RVM require only routine cleaning and basic lubrication, while remote monitoring allows technical teams to identify issues before they become operational problems. Reducing maintenance means reducing downtime, service costs and disruption to store operations.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Our systems were designed with maintenance in mind. Routine operations are limited to basic cleaning and lubrication, while remote monitoring helps identify issues early and minimise downtime.

9. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MACHINE IS FULL?

Modern reverse vending machines continuously monitor fill levels. When collection capacity approaches its limit, the system automatically notifies the operator, allowing collections to be scheduled efficiently.

High-compaction technologies also reduce the frequency of emptying by storing significantly more containers within the same footprint.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Remote monitoring continuously tracks fill levels, allowing collection schedules to be optimised before capacity becomes an issue. Combined with RiPress compaction, this significantly reduces emptying frequency.

10. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE MACHINE STOPS WORKING?

Remote monitoring allows technical teams to receive real-time alerts and diagnose many issues without waiting for the retailer to report them. If an on-site intervention is required, service teams can already know the nature of the problem before arriving, reducing repair times and limiting disruption.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

All Ripet RVM are remotely monitored. If an issue occurs, our technical team can often diagnose it remotely and, when necessary, plan on-site intervention quickly, reducing disruption for the retailer.

11. CAN A RVM INTEGRATE WITH LOYALTY PROGRAMMES?

Many retailers use DRS as more than a collection system. Modern RVM can integrate with loyalty schemes, digital coupons, retailer apps, promotional campaigns and charity donation initiatives. This allows every returned container to become an opportunity to strengthen customer engagement while encouraging repeat visits.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet systems can integrate with loyalty programmes, digital coupons, retailer apps, promotional campaigns and charity donation initiatives, turning every returned container into an opportunity to strengthen customer engagement and encourage repeat visits.

12. HOW MUCH WILL DRS COST MY BUSINESS?

The total cost of implementing DRS depends on several factors, including the chosen collection method, store layout, installation requirements and expected return volumes. Businesses should consider more than just the purchase price of equipment. Operational costs such as servicing, electricity, cleaning and logistics should also be assessed alongside potential income generated through Return Handling Fees (RHF) and increased customer visits. Many retailers are now evaluating DRS as a long-term investment rather than simply a compliance cost.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet offers a range of commercial options including purchase, leasing and pilot programmes. We help customers understand the total cost of ownership while identifying opportunities to maximise return on investment.

13. CAN A REVERSE VENDING MACHINE REALLY INCREASE SALES?

Many retailers initially see DRS as an operational requirement, but experience across Europe shows that Reverse Vending Machines can also become valuable customer engagement tools.

Customers returning containers are already visiting the store. By combining DRS with loyalty schemes, digital vouchers and promotional campaigns, retailers can encourage additional purchases during the same visit.

Well-positioned machines also help drive repeat footfall, providing further opportunities to increase basket spend over time.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet systems integrate with digital vouchers, loyalty programmes and promotional campaigns, helping retailers transform container returns into repeat visits and additional sales opportunities.

14. WHAT IS THE RETURN HANDLING FEE (RHF)?

The Return Handling Fee (RHF) is paid to businesses that collect eligible drink containers through the Deposit Return Scheme.

The fee is intended to compensate retailers for the operational costs associated with providing a return point, including equipment operation, floor space, staff support, cleaning and ongoing maintenance. Although RHF is not designed to generate significant profit on its own, it helps offset operating costs and forms an important part of the overall commercial case for installing a Reverse Vending Machine.

When combined with increased customer visits and additional in-store purchases, RHF contributes to the wider financial benefits of DRS.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet's high-capacity, low-maintenance systems help retailers maximise operational efficiency, allowing businesses to benefit from RHF while minimising operating costs.

15. WHAT HAPPENS DURING INSTALLATION AND IMPLEMENTATION?

Successful DRS implementation begins well before the machine arrives on site. Retailers should consider customer flow, accessibility, power requirements, servicing access and collection logistics when planning an installation.

Following installation, staff training, system commissioning and ongoing monitoring all help ensure a smooth launch and positive customer experience. A well-planned implementation reduces disruption while allowing retailers to begin benefiting from DRS as quickly as possible.

HOW RIPET ADDRESSES THIS CHALLENGE

Ripet supports customers throughout the entire implementation process, from initial site surveys and equipment selection through to installation, commissioning, staff training, remote monitoring and ongoing service support.

UNDERSTANDING CIRCULARITY

16. WHY ISN'T EVERY COLLECTED BOTTLE SUITABLE FOR BOTTLE-TO-BOTTLE RECYCLING?

Once PET becomes contaminated by other materials or enters mixed waste streams, its recycling potential decreases significantly.

Bottle-to-bottle recycling requires clean, traceable material collected under controlled conditions from the very beginning of the process.

This is why selective collection infrastructure plays such an important role.

17. WHY DOES TRACEABILITY MATTER?

Traceability records where and how materials have been collected throughout the recycling chain.

Besides supporting compliance with current and future regulations, it increases confidence in recycled material quality and enables reliable ESG reporting.

As circular economy legislation evolves, traceability is becoming an operational requirement rather than an added feature.

18. WHY DOES COLLECTION QUALITY MATTER MORE THAN COLLECTION VOLUME?

Collecting more containers is important, but volume alone does not guarantee circularity. If materials are contaminated or unsuitable for food-grade recycling, much of their economic and environmental value is lost.

High-quality collection preserves that value, enabling recovered PET to return to the bottle supply chain instead of being downcycled into lower-value products.

IS YOUR BUSINESS DRS READY?

A PRACTICAL CHECKLIST

- ☐ Do you understand whether your business is obligated to provide a return point?
- ☐ Have you assessed your expected container return volumes?
- ☐ Have you identified the best location for your collection point?
- ☐ Have you considered indoor versus outdoor installation?
- ☐ Do you understand how Return Handling Fees (RHF) work?
- ☐ Have you assessed the commercial opportunities beyond compliance?
- ☐ Have you considered how DRS could support your loyalty programme or promotional campaigns?
- ☐ Have you planned staff awareness and customer communication?
- ☐ Have you considered future expansion across multiple sites?
- ☐ Have you selected a supplier who can provide installation, servicing and long-term support?

Every business is different. Store size, customer volumes and available space all influence the right solution.

RIPET offers free consultations to help retailers assess their requirements and identify the most appropriate Reverse Vending Machine for their business.