

Touchless PPE vending machine joins the fight against COVID-19

The global pandemic has made most of us hyper-vigilant with hand hygiene, leading us to avoid touching things unnecessarily when in public. Wouldn't it be easier if the machines we are accustomed to using on a daily basis were touchless?

With this in mind, Ed Banner-Eve, executive director, and Henry Farrelly, managing director, founded [Stop the Spread Solutions](#), a touchless vending machine that dispenses PPE and rapid COVID-19 test kits. The machine addresses two key issues that have been prevalent in the 'new normal' – access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and hygiene on public-use machines – and the technology has the potential to be incorporated in other fields. Banner-Eve tells *Maddyness UK* more.

Why did you decide to get involved in the effort against COVID-19?

We were heavily affected by the lockdown in the UK. Henry and I kept hearing about people getting infected and affected financially by the virus. We took it upon ourselves to do what we can to help stop the spread, which is where we got the company name Stop the Spread Solutions. Furthermore, we thought we

should be doing something more productive with our masses of free time isolating in lockdown.

How did you take the vending machine from an idea to a fully functional product?

We started with a huge amount of research into the vending machine industry and how we could adapt it to be user-friendly during the pandemic. This was when we thought of the touchless vending machine idea. We are now the only wholly touchless vending machine on the UK market to-date, through payment and procurement.

It took around five months to initially make. It was meant to be slightly quicker than this but unfortunately the pandemic worsened, so we picked up delays with the production and people not being in the office.

Getting funding for a new idea is never easy, and so this took time so we had everything in place. To finally get our first cheque of more than £250,000 into the bank account was a long process. After our start-up investment, we had machines rolling out the next day. We had 16 out in one week to ensure the customers were getting quick and efficient service.

How do the vending machines work?

Our machines work through sensors. To purchase a product, the user waves their hand over the desired product sensor on the front of the device, which is clearly labelled and lit up with LEDs for ease. The screen located at eye level will show the user which product they have selected and how much their total transaction will be, then asking for the payment through contactless or 'tap' payment. The product is then dispensed to the bottom of the machine and becomes available through an automatic door. This opening was designed to be large enough that you can grab the product with zero contact with the machine.

We have installed nearly 30 machines across the UK, but due to the increase in cases and a further lockdown in the UK, many orders have been put on hold. We have sold to all sorts of businesses with a large amount of footfall including airports, theme parks, car parks, shopping centres, pubs, bars and equestrian stores. We are currently speaking to other countries, including Scotland, to install and supply the machines there.

What does 2021 hold for Stop the Spread Solutions?

2021 kicked off straight away through wholesale purchases of our new rapid COVID-19 test kits, which can be purchased through our website with speedy delivery.

There's a demand for reliable testing and PPE from small manufacturing and production businesses that need to have employees at work. We help them get what they need to keep their people safe and make sure they can be tested regularly.

The vending machines require people being out and about, so the lockdown has inevitably affected the machine's sales. However, we have massive orders coming in for the rapid COVID-19 test kits internationally, so we are looking to branch out and create a new franchise in the United States.

In the long term, we are looking to work closely with our pharmaceutical contacts and get more products out to the public to help stop the spread of the virus, eventually moving on to other health and safety products that people need and want.

Stop the Spread Solutions' vending machines dispense PPE such as rapid COVID-19 test kits, KN95 face masks and medical grade hand sanitiser.

