

Greener by the bottle

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Novel vending machine encourages Thais to recycle

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It looks exactly like a normal vending machine, but instead of inserting coins, you put in plastic bottles and out come the coins.

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P-Pet's research indicates one machine installed in a community will receive 600-800 bottles per day, totalling 30 kg, according to Mr Angkul.

Twenty of these P-Pet vending machines, aimed at tackling Thai's reluctance to recycle, are what 32-year-old Angkul Burintarajati aims to install in Bangkok schools by the second quarter of next year.

"Thais don't recycle; we keep garbage in our houses and wait for the 'saleng' vehicles to pick them up," he said.

With these machines, people receive the money immediately and they can choose whether to save their deposits in order to collect the total at a later time or donate the money altogether.

Although the P-Pet machines are not new to the international market, Mr Angkul said they are designed to foil shifty consumers who like to work their way around the system.

"For instance, some people will put glass bottles [into the machine] with dirt in them to increase the weight. The machine, connected via an online system, is able to filter out 'bad' bottles that will be returned," he said.

The redemption amount is calculated according to weight, providing the same rates as salengs of 15 baht per kilogramme. It takes five 500cc bottles to equal one baht.

The company hires another factory to produce the machines at the cost of 300,000 baht each. Current production capacity is 20 machines in two months.

Partly based on a franchise system, customers can purchase one machine for 400,000 baht, or pay 300,000 baht to buy at least 10 machines.

P-Pet's research indicates one machine installed in a community will receive 600-800 bottles per day, totalling 30 kilogrammes. This results in 9,000 baht per month, while water manufacturer ads add another 3,000 baht per month. Franchisees can receive 144,000 baht per year.

The plastic that is automatically ground by the machine will then be sent to Indorama, and 40% of the revenue will be given to the franchise. Franchisees could receive their money back within 2 1/2 years.

Mr Angkul said of all the garbage consumed locally, almost 50% is polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic, 20% aluminium cans and the rest are glass bottles, foam boxes and plastic cups.

Mr Angkul, the managing director of Assist Creation Co, experimented previously with selling incinerators and "biogesters," which turn garbage into fertiliser.

"Selling these two led to problems, since we had to find garbage from local governments. 'Tea money' of more than 30% was involved, so I needed another opportunity," said Mr Angkul.

He aims to install the vending machines in educational institutions, buildings, community areas, condominiums, department stores and factories with more than 1,000 employees.

Orders for provinces outside Bangkok will require at least 20 machines.

The 2-million-baht project, which started in 2009, gained success on Dec 15 last year when the National Innovation Agency offered 480,000 baht for the prototype.

Next year, the company aims to merge different types of garbage such as aluminium cans and glass.

Mr Angkul expects within five years P-Pet will be installed nationwide.

The company has also discussed collaboration with garment factories to use the fibre in plastic pellets mixed with cotton to make jumpers.

While the flooding cleanup will result in vast amounts of garbage, Mr Angkul, who is also a marketing specialist at Gigabyte NB, said P-Pet is halting its marketing campaigns because they would be inconsiderate and is asking its employees to help with the floods.

"Hopefully after the floods people will realise [the disaster] was caused by us [human beings], and they will be more thoughtful in terms of taking care of the environment," he said.

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