

Vancouver pot seller has high hopes for vending machines

Dispensers save on labour, reduce theft and product handling

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Chuck Varabioff of the B.C. Pain Society has what he thinks is the first marijuana vending machine in Canada.

Photograph by: Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun

VANCOUVER — Vending machines have dispensed snacks, beverages and a myriad of other consumer products for more than a century.

Now they dole out marijuana.

An East Vancouver medical marijuana dispensary — B.C. Pain Society — has installed what it believes to be the first pot vending machine in Canada and society director Chuck Varabioff said clients have embraced the new concept.

"The feedback has been absolutely incredible," he said in an interview Wednesday. "People come in, show their (membership) card and then they're good to go. The only negative thing is the odd person may have to wait in line while somebody uses the machine."

People using the society's marijuana products must be members, which requires a doctor's note confirming the need for medical pot.

The cash-only vending machine, which was installed three weeks ago, dispenses change and offers a wide range of marijuana strains in varying amounts.

Prices range from \$12 to \$50, which will get you a half-ounce of master kush.

Varabioff said the machine saves on labour, cuts down on potential theft and reduces the number of people handling the product.

"We use surgical gloves to package everything up in double heat-sealed bags, which cuts down on any chance of contamination of the product," he said.

Varabioff envisions a day when he can install and service similar vending machines in every nursing home and medical clinic in Vancouver, with those facilities getting a percentage of sales.

"I won't do anything outside the city of Vancouver, which has a pretty liberal attitude about this," he said. "Eventually, I see this going Canada-wide."

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