

Vending machine's strictly for laughs

\$10,000 gets you five joke machines that go anywhere

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BUSINESS REPORTER

Go ahead — laugh all you want at the idea of a vending machine, about the size of a pay phone, that tells jokes.

But you'll pay.

And that will make Chris Negus and Brent Hillier smile.

Negus and Hillier have plunged into the serious world of coin-operated vending machines and come up with Canada's very own joke-telling juke-box: the Yuk Yuk's Yukin' Funny Joke Machine.

The two have teamed up with Yuk

Yuk's to develop and market automated fun stations.

"I saw incredible potential for the concept right away," says Yuk Yuk's president Jeff Silverman.

Can you take a joke? If you can, the machines will dispense one or two-liners for the laughable suggested retail price of about 50 cents for four jokes, or roughly a minute of laughs, delivered by professional comedians, with canned laughter in the background.

"There's something for everyone," says Negus.

The battery-operated machines are about the size of a pay phone and hold comedy compact discs. Yuk Yuk's and the marketing duo plan to come up with new material all the time, and are already working on joke tracks in several languages.

The size and the fact that you can change the material means location,

location, location is no problem.

You can put a joke juke anywhere, in a bar, in a bingo hall, in the bathroom of your favorite nightclub next to the machines that dispense the gum that tastes funny.

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Having a range of CDs gives the machine operators some leeway to install jokes ranging from filthy and disgusting to just right for families and kids,

and gives the customer a choice as well. Rock the coin right into the slot and you can hear your favorite laundromat jokes, for example, or some wacky side-splitters about chartered accountancy.

Seriously, the guys who are marketing these machines don't want you to think they're a couple of clowns. Their company, Maverick Manufacturing Inc., based in Goderich, also markets sports card sticker machines, lottery ticket dispensers and toothbrush and panty hose dispensers, and that's no joke.

Although some types of machines just leave people cold, market research suggests that generally the vending-machine business leaves many operators laughing all the way to the bank.

The industry has enjoyed a consistent growth rate of 9 per cent a year

during the past dozen years.

Negus and Hillier are convinced that a laugh-starved public will easily part with coins for a few chuckles from the machines. But target customers are not you, the audience, but the vendors who will buy the machines and seek to place them around town.

For \$10,000, an investor interested in a small business can buy five of these babies and then make deals with local stores and restaurants to install the machines, splitting the take.

The two have already been swamped with inquiries.

Negus and Hillier are talking with at least one restaurant chain, and have set their horizons well beyond the one type of establishment they knew would be interested — strip joints.

The two have even fielded calls from as far away as the South Pacific. Funny they should ask, the two figure.