

Decoding the Aisles

A 2024 look at South Africa's packaging, labelling and in-store food scales

South African supermarkets and retailers are constantly challenged to evolve the shopping experience. From the moment customers step through the doors, their decisions are influenced by a multitude of factors, including product presentation, information accessibility, and even the tools they use to make their selections.

In this dynamic space, packaging, labelling, and in-store food scales play crucial roles in shaping customer behaviour and driving sales. In this feature, we'll delve into the current trends and future outlook of these key elements in the coming year, against a backdrop of continued economic challenges and political change.

Packaging: Sustainable, functional & personalised choices

South Africa's packaging industry is estimated to be worth over R80 billion, with plastic constituting a significant portion of the materials used.

Source: Packaging SA, 2023

However, consumer attitudes towards sustainability are shifting, and this is reflected in a number of current packaging trends:

The rise of eco-friendly options: consumers are increasingly seeking out products packaged in recycled, recyclable, or compostable materials. Paper, cardboard, and bioplastics are gaining



A number of local businesses are turning to paperboard cartons for their water packaging. One such brand is Ripple Water. The packaging offers a viable, more environmentally conscious alternative, to plastic bottled water. It is made from majority plant-based materials which makes it 61% renewable and 100% recyclable. www.nampak.com/

Consumer attitudes towards sustainability are shifting, and this is reflected in a number of current trends

traction, with South Africa witnessing a 20% growth in the production of bio-based plastics in 2022. Source: Bio-Based & Biodegradable Industries Association, 2023

According to Vanessa von Holdt, National Marketing Manager for the Institute of Packaging, the packaging industry and brand owners need to apply the principles of designing for recycling.

"Packaging materials should be easy to separate and be reclaimed for recycling to have a better

chance of being recycled and not ending up in landfill." Von Holdt continues ...



Vanessa von Holdt

“These principles need to be communicated to consumers with clear information on what to do with the packaging after it has fulfilled its primary role.”

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“Consumers also need to be educated, encouraged and engaged to ensure that packaging has the best chance of getting into the recycling stream,” she says. “This is often as simple as explaining dry and wet waste separation.”

Functionality reigns supreme: Packaging is no longer just about aesthetics; it needs to serve a purpose. Resealable pouches, portion control containers, and easy-open features are becoming increasingly popular, catering to busy lifestyles and reducing food waste.

“Functionality also links back to the sustainability question,” says Von Holdt.

“The strong consumer perception that paper is easier to recycle and more ‘eco-friendly’ will see brand owners using more paper-based packaging where feasible, and while this trend is not necessarily new, we expect to see more brand owners shying away from single-use plastic packaging and products in the coming year.”

Personalisation takes centre stage: Customised packaging that caters to specific dietary needs and preferences is gaining momentum. Products with QR codes linking to personalised recipes or nutritional information based on individual health goals talk directly to shoppers and encourage engagement with the brand.

That said, according to Von Holdt, on-pack communication will become a growing challenge, driven by legislation and the need to inform

Graphics courtesy of <https://fibrecircle.co.za/>



consumers facing increased financial constraints, the informal market is poised for significant expansion, outpacing the formal market fivefold.

“This is indicative of shifting consumer preferences towards more affordable and accessible retail options,” says Van der Walt.

“Wholesalers need to adapt by exploring innovative packaging solutions that cater to the diverse needs of informal market consumers, while ensuring product quality and affordability.”

Labels: Informing & engaging customers

With South Africa’s rising health consciousness, clear and informative labelling is no longer a luxury, but a necessity.

Here’s what’s trending ...

Clean label movement:

Consumers are demanding simple, easily understandable ingredients lists.

This translates to shorter labels with familiar terms, free from artificial additives and preservatives.

Reuben Naidoo, General Manager at Sign & Seal Labels, says the online shopping trend is driving the design of labels that are easy to understand, and also quickly identifiable for both customers and ‘personal shoppers’ for online orders

consumers about the contents and packaging .

“Brand owners and packaging designers are going to have to make some tough decisions about how and what they communicate on pack, all the while working towards creating more customised packaging for consumers.”

New market opportunities: One area of growth that packaging companies, suppliers, retailers and wholesalers should be looking at more seriously this year is the informal market.

Terence van der Walt, Marketing Manager at Nampak Paper and Plastic, says that with



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|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Serving Size 1/2 cup (125g) | |
| Servings Per Container about 3.5 | |
| Amount Per Serving | |
| Calories 100 | Calories from Fat 5 |
| | % DV* |
| Total Fat 0.5g | 1% |
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on the shopfloor and in the tracking of products as they leave the store. Naidoo says ...



Reuben Naidoo

“We’re already working with major retailers to help them track deliveries using variable customised QR code tracking labels. We also need to ensure that seals are tamper-proof, with evidence markers for customers.”

South Africa’s online grocery sector is experiencing a significant surge, driven by convenience, safety concerns, and changing consumer habits. This market is expected to reach R60 billion by 2025, doubling its 2021 size. Groceries are the fastest-growing online retail category, with 23% of South Africans now buying groceries online, and 63% of online grocery purchases being made on smartphones.

Sources: PwC, 2023 and World Wide Worx, 2023.

Nampak’s Van der Walt adds that ...



Terence van der Walt

“As consumers increasingly prioritise convenience and accessibility, retailers must prioritise packaging and labels optimised for e-commerce fulfilment, including secure packaging for safe transit and eco-friendly materials that align with sustainability concerns.”



South Africa’s Consumer Protection Act emphasises transparency, making this a crucial aspect for businesses.

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Photo & caption: www.nampak.com/

“Brands should adopt a holistic approach to sustainability, ensuring that environmental considerations permeate every aspect of their operations,” he says.

“This may involve sourcing eco-friendly materials, optimising production processes to minimise waste, and implementing responsible logistics practices. By aligning sustainability efforts with broader company values and culture, brands can amplify their impact and contribute to positive environmental stewardship beyond packaging initiatives.”



<https://heala.org/campaigns/>

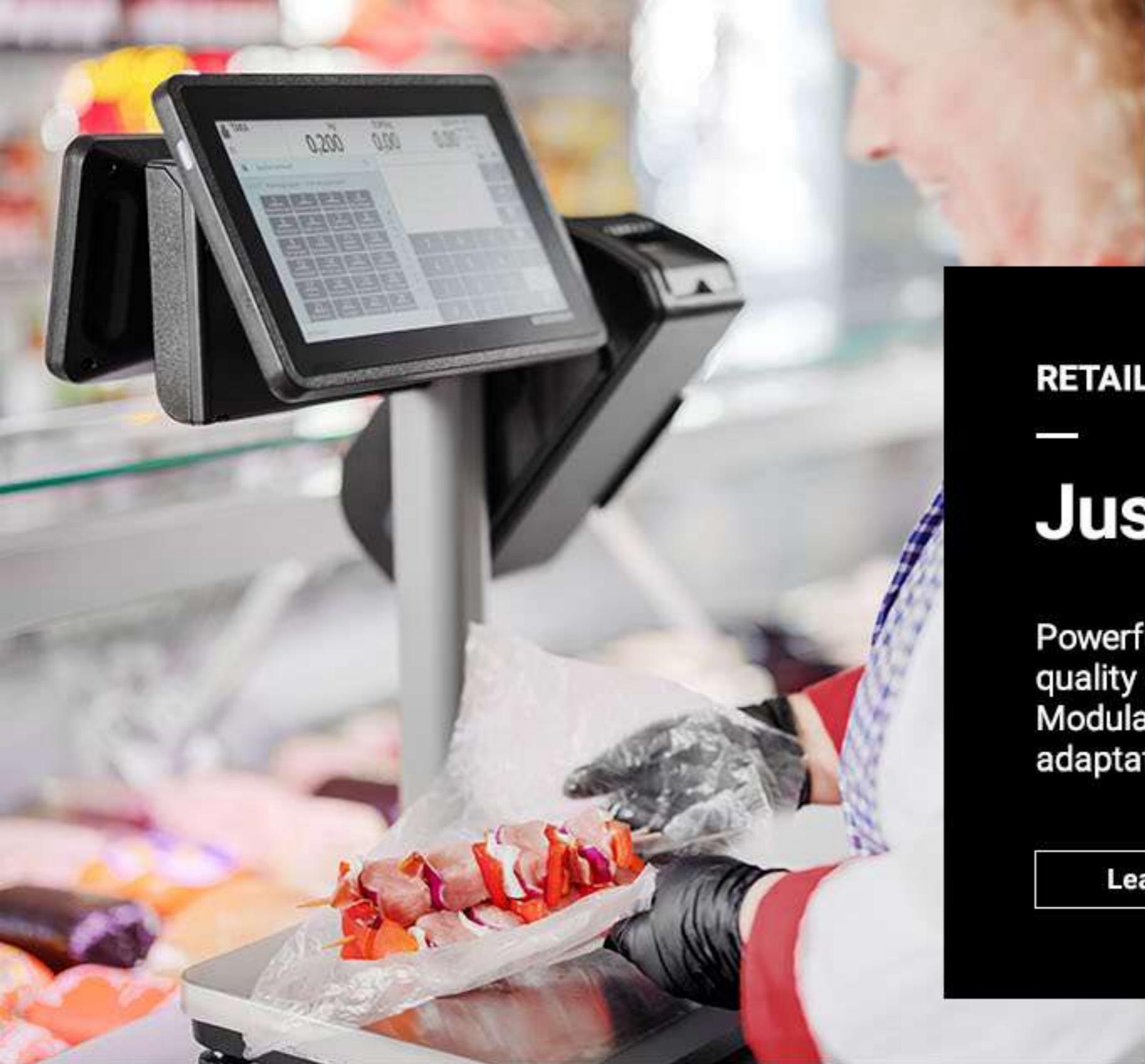
Spotlight on transparency: Labels are going beyond listing ingredients, offering details about origin, ethical sourcing, and environmental impact.

“Legislation will play a big role in determining what information must be carried on-pack going forward,” says Von Holdt. “The draft food labelling legislation, R3337, and the campaign for Front-of-Package Warning Labels for certain food products (initiated by the Department of Health and the HEALA campaign – HEALA is a coalition of civil society organisations advocating for equitable access to affordable, nutritious



food through a more just food system) will be a very visible change to how information is to be presented on packaging.”





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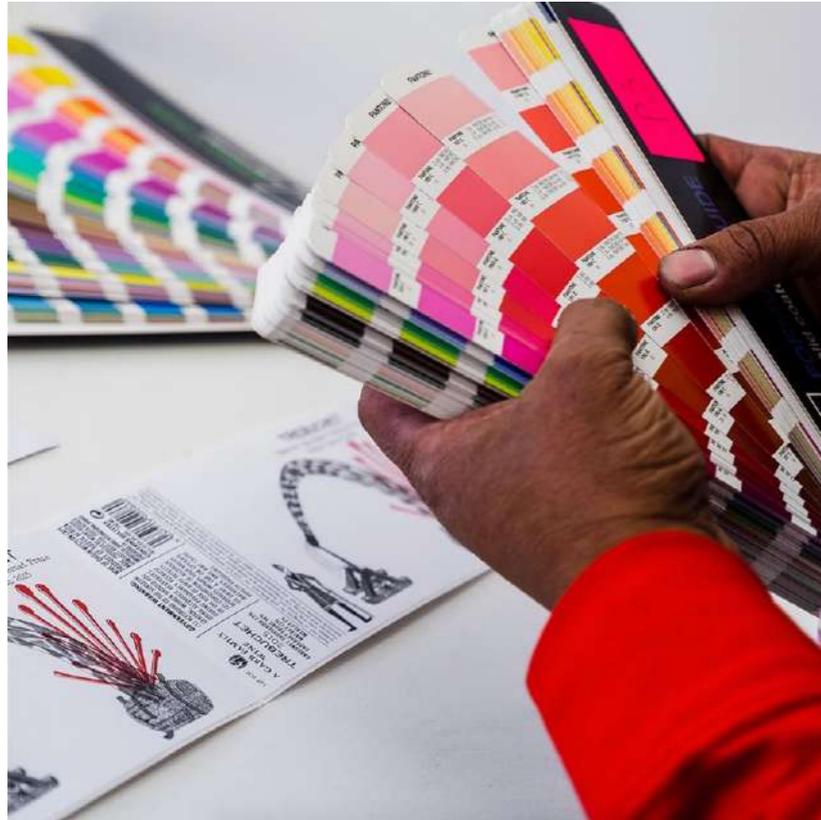
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Improved label printing technology:

From a production perspective, it's important to marry consumer demand and government legislation with the ability to produce new, innovative labels that both inform the customer and meet compliance standards.

"The current trend leans heavily towards digital printing for producing quick, cost-effective produce labels with the least waste," says Sign & Seal Labels' Naidoo. "Digital printers can produce labels much faster than conventional methods since they don't require tooling or the creation of polymer plates prior to printing," he says.

"One of the digital machines we recently procured has the option of variable colour printing, the first of its kind in Africa, which allows us to create a print of different labels of the same

substrate in one continuous run. This results in massive cost and waste reductions, with the added benefit of more consistent colour accuracy for branding."

Sustainable labelling: Labels are often not taken into consideration when it comes to creating sustainable packaging, and so the onus is on label printers and brands to specify recyclable label materials that don't need to be separated from the packaging for recycling.

"On a practical level, we need to see more labels that are easy to separate from the packaging,

Visual: [Zeljkosantrac, www.canva.com/](http://Zeljkosantrac.www.canva.com/)



and greater use of 'eco-friendly' adhesives, inks and coatings," explains Von Holdt.

"Brand owners may be looking for drastic ways to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability, such as the recent move by Coca-Cola to



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Did you know?

Paper recycling does not 'save trees'? Trees for paper are grown sustainably and specially farmed for productive purposes – in other words, they are planted and grown to be harvested, and paper is not made from indigenous forests. <https://fibrecircle.co.za/>



remove all the labels from their Sprite bottles globally," she adds.

"This is unlikely to see widespread application in South Africa, however, given the draft food labelling legislation which will demand more detailed information to be communicated on packs."

Naidoo concurs but says that label printers are becoming more innovative in the pursuit of sustainability goals. "We recently introduced a product called Clean Flake, an adhesive that is recyclable with all polypropylene containers and bags. We've also introduced an LDPE label for the packaging of soups, with a special adhesive that can be recycled along with the label."

Nampak's Van der Walt says that it's imperative for brands to steer clear of vague or ambiguous language that may contribute to greenwashing, the misleading use of environmental claims to enhance a product's appeal.

"Terms like 'biodegradability' are often misused and misunderstood," he says. "Brands should exercise caution and ensure a thorough understand-

ing of terminology before incorporating it into their packaging messaging. Transparency and honesty about sustainability efforts are crucial in building consumer trust and credibility."



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Visual courtesy of www.123RF.com



In-store food scales: Empowering informed choices

In-store food scales are no longer just about measuring produce. They're evolving into powerful tools that empower informed choices, combat food waste, and enhance the overall customer experience.

For example, scales with tare functions and portion size guides empower customers to buy only what they need, reducing food waste, which is a major concern in South Africa with over 10 million tons wasted annually, according to CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research). That's why a 2023 Checkers initiative showcased scales that can recommend recipes based on selected ingredients, inspiring customers to reduce waste.

Scales with unit pricing capabilities further allow customers to compare prices more effectively, making informed choices based on value rather than only on package size.



Visual courtesy of Syda Productions, www.canva.com/

Scales with built-in nutritional calculators or recipe suggestions can be invaluable for customers with specific dietary requirements or portion control needs. Last year Woolworths introduced a pilot programme of scales with built-in calculators or linked apps that can display calorie counts, allergen warnings, and portion sizes, catering to specific dietary needs.

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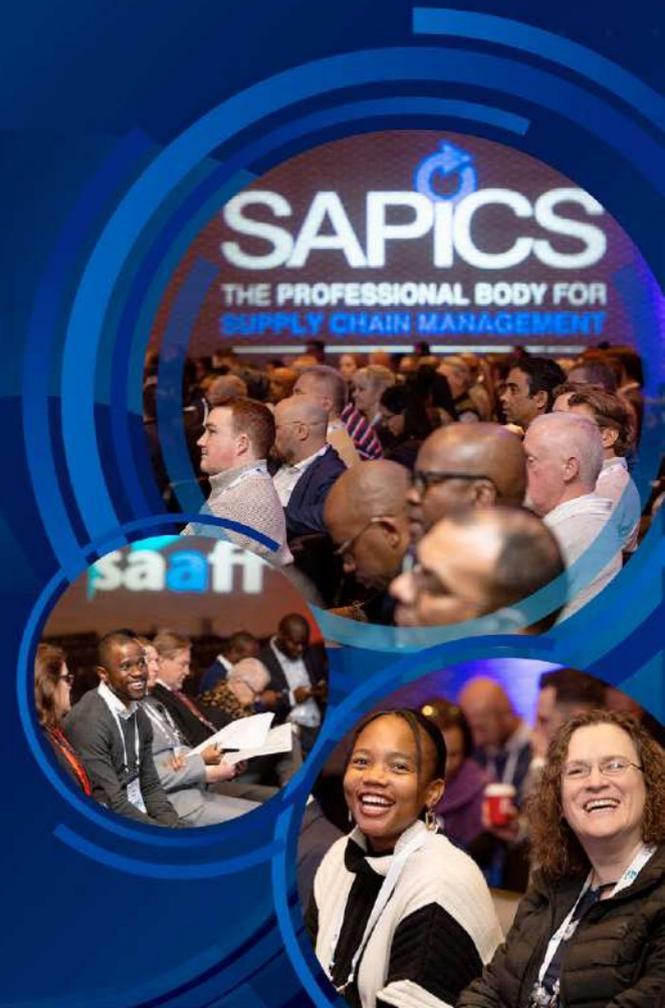
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Looking ahead, the next frontier for in-store scales is artificial intelligence (AI). Imagine that instead of having to hand over food packs to a scale teller or looking up one food item among many at a self-service scale, you can instead just put your produce on the scale and have it automatically recognised, weighed and priced for your customer.



Visual: www.bizerba.com/

This exact technology is already being rolled out by scale manufacturers like Bizerba, which recently partnered with a developer and distributor of solutions for AI-based object recognition, whose technology will be integrated into Bizerba's RetailApp Object Recognition in the future. The new partnership will enable customers in the

retail sector to automatically recognise fruit and vegetables on Bizerba self-service scales.

For a more hands-on approach, companies like Avocet Scales have introduced twin-monitor scales that let customers see exactly which products are being weighed and what they cost, right at the till counter.

With high-resolution displays, customers can visually track the weighing and packaging of their selected products during checkout, and even interrogate their purchases further with interactive content from the scale screen.

Visual courtesy of <https://seam.co.za/>



Embracing the future of retail

The future of retail packaging and labels is all about bold innovation and sustainability.

Firstly, ditching traditional design and embracing eye-catching graphics, vibrant colours, and impactful messaging becomes paramount. Think eye-grabbing cartons with exciting packaging types like Seam Coffee's partnership with Nampak that was announced last year, which is a South African made range of coffee packaging that is both recyclable and low impact. Product versatility and coffee and water combo. eco-friendly solutions are in the spotlight.

Secondly, sustainability takes centre stage with South Africa's new EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) legislation. Retailers can make a real difference by actively supporting and collaborating with PROs (Producer Responsibility Organisations) and recycling initiatives.

This demonstrates environmental responsibility, builds trust with consumers, and enhances brand reputation. Embrace the change, get creative, and be a leader in responsible retail practices.

As many retailers and wholesalers kick their collective financial year into gear, South Africa's supermarket and wholesale landscape will continue to evolve. By embracing sustainable packaging, transparent labelling,

and innovative in-store tools like food scales, businesses can stay ahead of the curve and create a shopping experience that resonates with today's informed and engaged consumer.

Remember, packaging, labelling, and scales are not just about products; they're about building trust, fostering loyalty, and ultimately, driving success in the ever-competitive retail and wholesale environment. **SR**



Guy Lerner, writer and photographer, writes across diverse topics in business, technology, and retail, including consumer technology, telecommunications software, user experience technology, security, and power systems. He has worked with multinational companies in South Africa and Australia and is currently based in Cape Town. Guy holds a B.Sc. Honours degree from the University of Witwatersrand). Contact Wilkins Ross Communications (www.wilkinsrossglobal.com) or guy@wilkinsross.co.za.



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