

Outside the box

Packaging, label & scales trends for 2025

Retail packaging, labelling and weighing solutions are no longer just operational necessities; they are strategic tools that influence consumer behaviour, streamline operations and drive sustainability initiatives.

The rapid shift in consumer preferences for sustainability, convenience and digital integration is placing pressure on stores and service providers to think 'outside the box'. Moreover, with growing environmental consciousness, brands and manufacturers, retailers and wholesalers are expected to adopt greener solutions that reduce waste while maintaining product integrity, as well as build customer loyalty.

“ Advancements in smart packaging, such as QR codes and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, are transforming the way customers interact with products and providing them with valuable information and personalised shopping experiences. ”

Labelling is also undergoing significant transformation. With new compliance standards on the horizon, digital labels with real-time tracking capabilities, sustainability credentials and enhanced transparency measures are becoming industry staples.



<https://blog.chemcogroup.com/>

By the same token, retail scales, once limited to simple weight measurements, are becoming high-tech instruments that integrate with POS (point of sale) systems and inventory management platforms. Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being leveraged to optimise stock levels and improve operational efficiency and self-service experiences.

For retailers and supermarket chains, embracing these advancements is no longer optional; it's a necessity for staying competitive.

From the shelf to the checkout counter, technological innovation is reshaping the way products are handled, sold and experienced.

Packaging trends

It's all in the packaging, as the saying goes. While visually appealing, practical and user-friendly packaging will always be top-of-mind for brands mindful of aisle competition, there are a myriad of other variables that factor in the packaging choices for brands and retailers alike. We've taken some of the global headline trends to see how they could impact the local supermarket and FMCG retail industry in the year ahead.



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Sustainability. While South African consumers are beginning to prioritise environmental responsibility, prompting manufacturers and suppliers to adopt more sustainable packaging solutions, the fact remains that sustainable packaging is not always practical.



Mark Anderson

According to Mark Anderson, Portfolio Director at Specialised Exhibitions, a division of Montgomery Group and organisers of the annual Propak Africa show at Nasrec, Johannesburg, plastic packaging remains a key component of South Africa's packaging sector driven by demand from the food, beverage, and pharmaceutical markets for its durability, lightweight nature and cost-effectiveness.

"At the same time, growing interest in recyclable and sustainable materials is reshaping the industry," says Anderson. "Because of this, local suppliers are encouraged to innovate and develop solutions that address both industry requirements and environmental concerns."

Looking outward at other markets such as Australia, compostable and biodegradable materials are at the forefront of sustainable packaging (<https://thecuttingedge.com>). Refillable and reusable packaging such as compostable coffee cups and food containers are being adopted by consumers, and packaging marked as 'Home Compostable' helps consumers make sustainable decisions at home. Australia is phasing out single use plastics, with stricter legislation and consumer demand



New padded paper envelopes replace plastic bubble-wrap lined envelopes. www.aboutamazon.com.au



Amazon are delivering essential items – such as nappies, toilet rolls and cases of drinks – to shoppers without additional delivery packaging, such as a box or paper bag. Eligible items are shipped in the manufacturer's original packaging with just an address label added, avoiding unnecessary material use and reducing the weight of deliveries. Since 2021, the number of products shipped without additional Amazon packaging has more than tripled in Australia.



Amazon has right-sized packages to match the products, using less material overall, and increased the amount of recycled content that goes into making them. In 2021, Amazon Australia replaced single-use plastic air pillows with recyclable paper filler to protect goods during shipping, and in 2023 it reduced box weights by 25% and label sizes by 50%, to minimise waste.

driving the change. Business is on board too.

E-commerce giant Amazon has stopped packing products in single-use plastic delivery bags and envelopes in its Australian distribution network.

Customers will now be receiving packages in flexible paper bags and padded envelopes, which are more easily recyclable in household recycling across Australia. Recyclable components, designs that minimise waste and cardboard packaging are also significantly reducing Amazon's environmental impact.



Amazon uses machine learning algorithms to determine best fit for each order, especially those with multiple items, to decrease empty space in boxes. Optimised shipments require less space, helping reduce the number of delivery vehicles on the road. <https://sustainability.aboutamazon.com/waste/packaging>

Globally since 2015, Amazon has reduced the weight of outbound packaging per shipment by 43% on average, and avoided more than 3 million metric tons of packaging material.

In South Africa, embracing such practices aligns with global trends and resonates with local consumers who want to be more eco-conscious. Implementing sustainable packaging can boost brand image and meet the growing demand for environmentally friendly products.

However, knowledge is power, and education plays a critical role in spreading the word about the benefits of sustainable packaging for communities and the environment.





Sustainable plastic packaging homegrown in South Africa



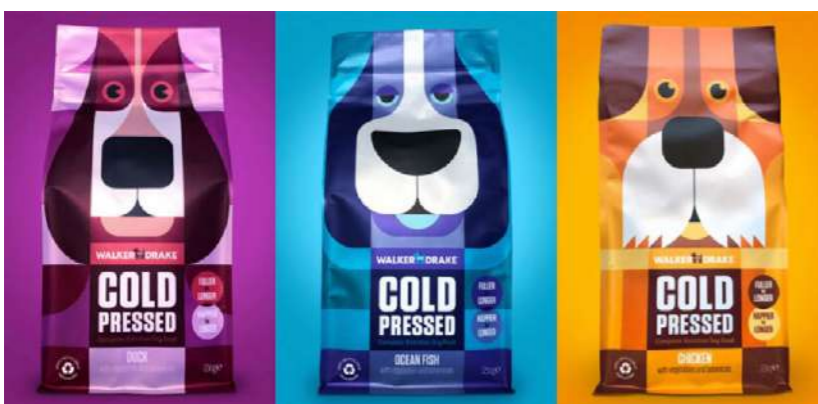
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Smart packaging. The integration of technology into packaging – known as smart packaging – is transforming the retail experience. Features such as QR codes, Near Field Communication (NFC), and augmented reality (AR) offer consumers interactive experiences and provide retailers and stores with valuable data. For example, QR codes can offer product traceability, usage instructions and promotional content, and can have a positive impact on customer engagement.

For South African retailers, adopting smart packaging can lead to better supply chain management and a more personalised shopping experience, and foster greater customer loyalty.



'Cold Pressed' dog food is a relatively new concept in the UK, so the design needed to reflect this. The small Flat Bottom and large Quad Seal bags, with huge branding space, helped to get the message across clearly, without compromising the final appearance. The result is a bold, confident, modern design, with both strong and recyclable packaging. Tear notches make opening easier and a zipper makes sure it can be closed again to keep the food fresh to reduce food waste. <https://lawprintpack.co.uk/walker-and-drake/>

Personalisation. Personalised packaging is gaining traction as consumers seek unique and tailored experiences. Advancements in digital printing allow for customisation at scale, enabling retailers to offer packaging that reflects individual preferences or regional tastes.



The Honestly Good Smoothie Co. is in a food-safe, 100% recyclable PE/PE stand-up pouch. The company's organic approach and philosophy extends to everything they do, from their transparent and sustainable preparation to re-using or recycling 100% of all packaging to donating two meals to those in need for every box they send out. A see-through window and clear Matt PE film helps give the product a 'frosty' look due to the film's characteristics. <https://lawprintpack.co.uk/walker-and-drake/>

Incorporating personalised elements into packaging can differentiate local retailers in a competitive market, making products more appealing to diverse consumer segments. These include reusable containers (boxes or bags designed for storage after purchase), transformative designs (packaging that converts into a decorative or functional item), and convenience-focused solutions, such as easy-open tabs, resealable bags, and stackable designs.

E-commerce. The surge in e-commerce has necessitated packaging designs that cater to online shopping dynamics. Packaging must be durable to withstand shipping, yet minimalistic to reduce costs and environmental impact. Additionally, designs should be visually appealing to enhance the digital unboxing experience, encouraging brand connection, social media sharing and brand promotion.

Looking outward, Amazon's sustainability programme has resulted in a 43% reduction in average per-shipment packaging weight in the US, Canada and the EU since 2015. Their Prevent, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle framework focuses on key performance indicators that include improving recyclability of goods and packaging, and replacing plastic



Companies should actively promote the multi-cycle reusability of various products, significantly reducing waste generation compared to single-use disposable options. Products need to be built to last, incorporating designs that facilitate repairs and upgrades, reducing the need for replacements. This includes Menstrual cups – their reusability compared to disposable options emphasises a significant reduction in waste. <https://blog.chemcogroup.com/>

delivery packaging with household recyclable paper filler. Amazon saw a 9% decrease in average single-use plastic packaging weight per shipment across its global operations network in 2023, compared to 2022, according to its sustainability report.

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Convenience. Modern consumers value convenience, which is prompting manufacturers to design packaging that is user-friendly. Features such as easy-open tabs, resealable closures and single-serve portions cater to busy lifestyles to make products more accessible. Flexible packaging solutions, such as pouches, are gaining popularity due to their lightweight nature and ease of use.

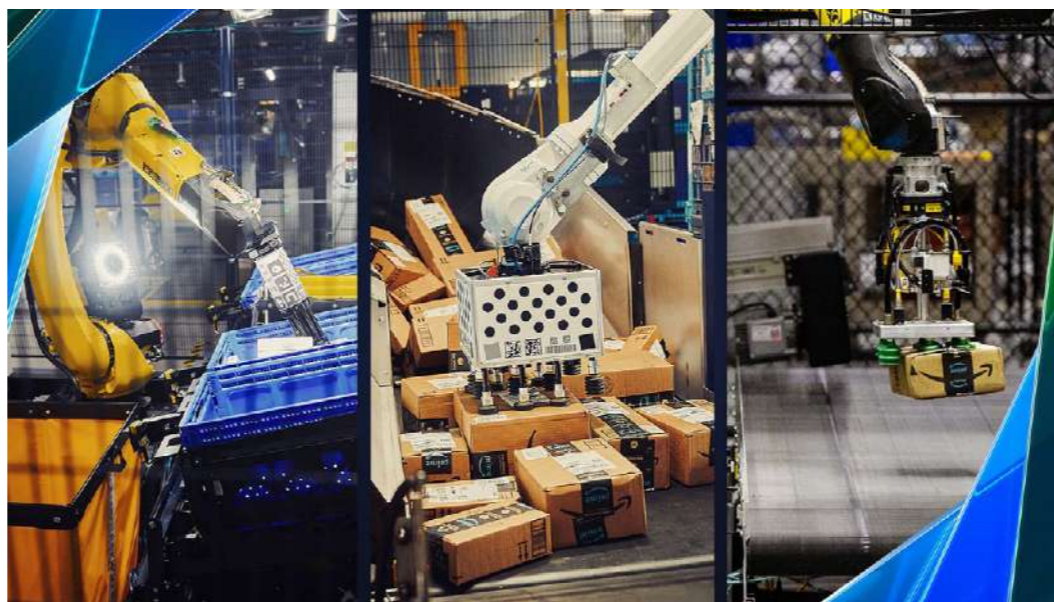
Packaging technology. Advancements in packaging technology are opening new avenues for manufacturers and retailers. Anderson suggests that automation and digitisation will be significant themes at Propak Africa 2025, not only for general packaging but also within the plastics, printing and processing sectors. He says ...

“The rapid adoption of Industry 4.0 practices across manufacturing, including automation, smart packaging and digitised machinery, highlights how critical these trends are to the expo.”

“Exhibitors will demonstrate cutting-edge technologies, from automated machinery to advanced materials, enabling companies to increase efficiency, sustainability and cost-effectiveness across production lines.”

Some left-field solutions are gaining traction abroad. For example, edible packaging made from materials such as seaweed and algae, is emerging as a sustainable alternative, reducing waste and offering unique consumer experiences.

Additionally, the use of AI in packaging design is optimising materials and creating more efficient



Amazon's foray into robotics began more than a decade ago when the company acquired Massachusetts-based Kiva Systems in 2012. Since then, Amazon has developed, produced, and deployed more than 750 000 robots across its operations network. The goal of robotics technology within Amazon's operations is to pair employees with the right technology to make their workday safer, easier, and more productive, while delivering packages to customers faster than ever. The scaling of these systems has reached a new crescendo with the recent launch of Amazon's next-generation, state-of-the-art fulfilment centre in Shreveport, Louisiana, equipped with the latest innovations in robotics to support employees who package and deliver customer orders. This site uses eight different robotics systems that work in harmony. Additionally, Amazon Web Services cloud computing infrastructure enables these robots to operate efficiently by storing and processing rich data generated by sensors, cameras, and machine processes. Amazon plans to scale these robotics systems to existing facilities across the network. Written by Tyler Greenawalt, www.aboutamazon.com/



Proteus is Amazon's first fully autonomous mobile robot, meaning it can navigate freely throughout a site using sensors to detect and avoid objects in front of it. Other mobile robots, such as Titan and Hercules, are confined to areas where only authorised robotic specialists can enter, and read barcodes that are stickered to the floor as navigation coordinates. Proteus works in conjunction with Cardinal – a robotic arm that loads packages into carts – to move those carts from the outbound dock area of the fulfilment centre to the loading dock, where packages are loaded onto trucks. www.aboutamazon.com/news/operations/amazon-robotics

solutions. AI is already being used by some manufacturers to analyse consumer preferences and tailor packaging designs to suit specific demographics and add greater appeal and functionality.

Labels and labelling

As with packaging, the local FMCG retail labelling industry is undergoing significant transformation driven by advancements in technology, regulatory changes and a heightened focus on sustainability.

To remain competitive and compliant, retailers should stay informed about emerging label technologies and adapt their procurement

strategies accordingly. For instance, the shift towards digital labelling is becoming more pronounced, with regulations beginning to mandate the inclusion of QR codes and other digital tags on product packaging. These digital elements ...

“provide consumers with instant access to comprehensive product information, such as origin, ingredients, usage instructions and authenticity verification.”

For manufacturers and retailers, this improves transparency and facilitates compliance with evolving labelling standards. In South Africa, staying ahead of these regulations is crucial to avoid potential market access issues.

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Christian Schiess

Christian Schiess, Managing Director of retail hardware and software manufacturer, Bizerba Southern Africa, concurs, adding that the implementation of linerless label technology means manufacturers can now print any information onto a product label at point of sale.

“Critical information such as nutritional information, allergens and even batch codes can be printed on a variable length label,” he says. “This links the label through the product’s value chain and enables the consumer to trace any product back to its origins.”

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is another label technology transforming inventory management on the shopfloor by enabling real-time tracking of products throughout the supply chain. RFID labels allow stores to monitor stock levels accurately, reduce shrinkage and improve replenishment processes.

As regulatory frameworks evolve, incorporating RFID into labelling practices will become more important for maintaining operational efficiency and meeting compliance requirements. That’s because consumers and regulators alike are demanding greater transparency in product sourcing and manufacturing processes.

According to Agribook SA, labels now need to provide detailed information about product origins, supply chain practices and labour conditions. Implementing traceability systems, such as block-

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chain or advanced tracking technologies, can help retailers offer this transparency, thereby building consumer trust and ensuring compliance with emerging regulations.

Initiatives such as Woolworths’ commitment to a fully transparent and ethical supply chain

by 2025, exemplifies the direction in which the industry is heading.

New technology is feeding into another important trend – label sustainability – which, as with packaging, is influencing shopping habits. As such, retailers are expected to adopt eco-friendly labelling practices, using labels made from recyclable or biodegradable materials and which provide clear recycling instructions. Shoprite’s 2024 Report says that Shoprite’s newer developed premium label ranges, such as their Forage & Feast range, use responsibly sourced and recyclable packaging, with On-Pack Recycling Labels – just one of many instances where local retailers are walking the talk of sustainable labelling.



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Displaying information a product’s carbon footprint and environmental impact is becoming a regulatory requirement in many regions. South African retailers who proactively implement these practices to align with global labelling standards and circular economy goals (reduce waste, increase resource

efficiency, regenerate nature and create a more sustainable environment) will also benefit by catering to the environmentally conscious consumer base and increase awareness to a broader base of consumers.



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“We are taking leaps into developing filmic labels and applicators which can then be recycled directly together with the plastic material they are bonded to, without needing to remove it from the surface of the plastic material,” says Bizerba’s Schiess.

“Linerless labels also offer an immediate saving in packaging material with even more benefits in quality, versatility and customer value-add, which contributes to their sustainability benefits.”

The integration of advanced technologies into labelling is paving the way for more interactive and informative consumer experiences. Invisible barcodes, for example, are transforming sustainability by improving recycling accuracy and enhancing supply chain transparency without altering the visual aesthetics of packaging.

By adopting such innovations, retailers can meet regulatory requirements, reduce environmental impact, and offer consumers a richer, more engaging interaction with their products.



Bizerba weighing and labelling systems are in use at nine lines at five Bidfood production sites. The solutions are integrated into Bidfood’s central product database which talks to the Bizerba database. The minced meat line helps prevent incorrectly weighted packaging from leaving the plants and prevents incorrect weights from being packaged unnecessarily. Bizerba checkweighers and software for controlling the filling system have saved Bidfood a lot of packaging material, saving money and is good for the environment. The entire process is automatic and hygienic. www.bizerba.com/za/

Tipping the scales

Not all products are pre-packaged and labelled for the shopfloor, which is where, for many stores, scales come in.

Weighing scales have long since evolved beyond their traditional role of measuring product weight. Modern scales are now integral components of the FMCG retail ecosystem, enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and customer experience. This transformation is driven by advancements in digital technology, seamless integration with POS systems, and the incorporation of AI.

Digital scales have become a staple in contemporary retail environments. Unlike their analogue predecessors, digital scales offer precise measurements, user-friendly interfaces and enhanced durability. Features such as touchscreens, programmable keys, and customisable displays allow stores to streamline operations and reduce human error.

In South Africa, the adoption of digital scales is gaining momentum as retailers recognise the benefits of improved accuracy and operational efficiency. Bizerba’s Schiess says Bizerba pioneered the connected retail aspects of retail scales, “which uniquely allow our clients to integrate any of their existing ERP systems with our scales,” he explains.

“We develop our own retail software and applications for all PC-based scales, including the customer-facing application that features AI-driven automatic object recognition in fresh food departments, fraud prevention applications, and yield and production management software for the butchery and deli counter or back of house.”

This seamless integration with POS systems is a significant trend in retail scale technology. It ensures that weight data is automatically transmitted to the store’s POS system, eliminating manual entry and minimising handling errors.

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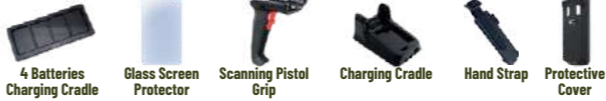
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POS integration enables real-time pricing, inventory management, and sales analytics, giving stores a unified platform to manage transactions, monitor stock levels and generate insightful reports. This holistic approach enhances decision-making and operational efficiency.

Schiess suggests that one of the ways AI-driven digital scales are helping retailers improve their efficiency while improving the customer experience is with self-service functionality.

“AI-driven automatic object recognition helps a retailer use in-store staff more effectively instead of having them wait for a customer at the fresh counter scale,” he says.

“This weighing and labelling operation can easily be completed by the customer with the assistance of intuitive scale software, while staff can be reassigned to ensure stock is replenished. It makes for a smoother shopping experience for the customer; no more standing in lines at the weigher, or memorising numbers of products when self-weighing.”

AI is indeed revolutionising retail operations and scales are no exception. AI algorithms can predict demand patterns, optimise pricing strategies and manage inventory levels. For instance, AI can analyse historical sales data to forecast peak periods, allowing retailers to adjust staffing and stock accordingly.

Incorporating AI into scale systems can also prevent loss by identifying discrepancies between recorded weights and expected values, thereby reducing shrinkage.



Innovative mobile school bags that double as school desks. The desk is made of a hard recycled plastic, can be folded up and has wheels that make it easy for even small children to pull home. A solar light is fitted to the desk, which helps learners in low resource settings without electricity to study at night. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/>

An added advantage of digital scales is their feed-in to inventory management and other retail software applications. According to Schiess, if all transactions are captured, which they can be on digital scales, then inventory can be monitored live.

“This means goods that leave the counter, but have not yet been run through the tills, are immediately captured and monitored, giving store managers a better overview of product availability in real time,” he says. “We additionally support this scale functionality with adjacent technology such as smart shelves, which provide live AI-supported inventory updates.

“Moreover, digital scale technology can tie-in with packaging and labels by capturing original data, such as traceability codes, ingredients and so on, and re-purposing this information on customer-facing labels. The entire experience forms part of what we call Supersmart, a holistic approach to customer self-scanning and self-checkout techno-

logy for which we and our partners don’t just deliver the in-store software, but also the hardware to verify purchases for better fraud prevention.”

Importantly, modern scales also contribute to sustainability initiatives by helping to minimise wastage. Accurate measurements ensure that customers receive the correct quantity of products, reducing excess packaging and spoilage. This is where compliance

with local measurement standards regulations is crucial. Digital scales with calibration features help retailers adhere to these standards and avoid potential legal issues.



In 2025, artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to play a pivotal role across the entire packaging landscape, from design and development to supply chain management and consumer engagement. <https://blog.chemcogroup.com/>



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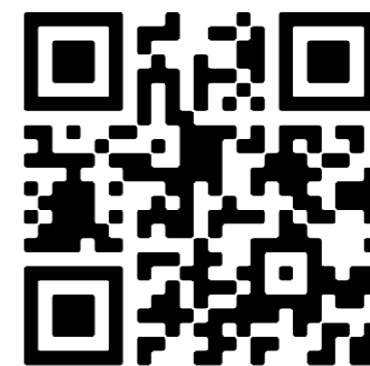
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Closing thoughts

As we kick off the 2025 financial year, South African FMCG retailers are having to navigate an increasingly digital and environmentally conscious marketplace, where packaging, labelling and weighing technologies are emerging as essential components of a successful retail strategy.

Whether through sustainable packaging solutions, data-driven labelling or AI-powered scales, the future of retail is being shaped by innovations that prioritise efficiency, transparency, and customer engagement.

It is also clear that sustainability is no longer a niche consideration; it is a business imperative. Retail groups, wholesalers and independents that adopt eco-friendly packaging and labelling solutions will not only reduce their environmental footprint but also strengthen their brand reputation in the eyes of conscious consumers.

By leveraging smart technologies such as RFID and QR codes, manufacturers and stores can provide customers with instant access to product origins, nutritional details and recycling guidelines, fostering greater trust and loyalty.

<https://stockcake.com/>



This carry-out packaging for Vesuvio Pizzeria, by Angelica Bains, becomes a portable place setting. <https://thisismold.com/>

At the same time, the modernisation of weighing scales is streamlining store operations. AI-enhanced, digitally integrated scales improve efficiency at fresh food counters and checkout points while providing real-time data insights that optimise inventory management. These advancements have the potential to contribute to smoother, more efficient workflows and a more satisfying customer journey.

For stores looking to future-proof their operations, embracing these innovations is a strategic move, positioning them as leaders in an FMCG sector that is rapidly advancing toward a digital, sustainable, and consumer-driven future.

The next step? Retailers should actively explore partnerships with manufacturers and suppliers who prioritise innovation, keep abreast of regulatory changes, and continuously assess how technology can be leveraged to improve efficiency and consumer engagement. By doing so, they will meet the demands of today's market and lay the foundation for long-term success in an ever-evolving FMCG retail environment. **SR**

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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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Convenient and reliable

Designed for sales counters, backrooms, and self-service weighing areas, the FreshBase Plus AI scale features an intuitive touchscreen interface for a smooth user experience. Operators benefit from fast, precise weighing and printing, high recognition accuracy, and reliable performance.

Engineered with a robust design and high-quality components, this scale withstands even the harshest retail environments. Its durable construction ensures long-term reliability and maximum uptime, making it a future-proof investment for retailers.

Stay ahead with AI innovation

By choosing the FreshBase Plus AI scale, retailers invest in a solution that simplifies operations, boosts efficiency, and enhances customer experience. Stay ahead in the competitive retail landscape with cutting-edge AI technology that ensures accuracy, security, and ease of use.

