

# Same streets, Different strategies

## Inside two Pretoria forecourts

Not all forecourts are built equal, and in South Africa those differences are often most visible once you step inside the convenience store.

The c-store has become a key expression of brand intent, retail capability and decision making, reflecting not only how a site is designed to trade, but how it responds to the realities around it. What appears on shelf, how food-to-go is presented, layout choices, range discipline and customer flow under pressure have become practical indicators of retail execution. Together, these elements begin to show how support structures, strategic partnerships and scale can influence what ultimately reaches the customer – even when sites serve similar catchments and face comparable trading conditions.

Forecourts across the country continue to evolve within a complex operating environment, shaped by a mix of global brand standards, local ownership realities and ongoing pressures ranging from infrastructure challenges to competition and changing consumer expectations. Visiting two forecourts on opposite ends of Pretoria highlights how differently this evolution can play out. One is operated by a large international petroleum brand, supported by a well-established retail partner and a defined store blueprint. The other is a smaller, locally present petroleum brand operating without



Competition in the area is tough and the Hot Foods department within the store will need to keep innovating to ensure that they stay relevant and competitive.

the scale of a global player, yet serving many of the same customers with similar convenience expectations. Both sites trade in competitive environments, both are run by teams navigating real-world challenges, and both are making choices around

range, layout and food-to-go. What emerges is not a question of which model is better, but how scale, partnership and local context shape the convenience offer that meets the customer on the c-store shop floor.

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The bp Pick n Pay Express Jean Avenue in Centurion is owned by Ntokozo Cele, who took over the site at the end of 2022. Since then, the business has had to navigate more than its fair share of challenges. Not only did the new owner undertake a store revamp, but also a period during which the local municipality closed a section of the road near the site to repair a sinkhole (not a quick process). Despite this, the store officially reopened on 14 November 2025, marking day one of the newly revamped operation.

The site is positioned on a busy intersection along Jean Avenue, with an Engen forecourt next to it. A multitude of shopping centres and nationally branded QSRs are nearby. It makes for an interesting and competitive trading environment, where easy access, visibility, differentiation and execution matter.

The new store spec is neat and fresh, with a noticeable focus on the Wild Bean Café. The shift in colour palette is one of the most striking changes. Moving away from the brand's familiar red into a more upmarket black and gold look, the logo is confidently positioned on the front glass window. The 'Now We're Cooking' banner above the ovens adds a touch of cheeky humour and brings some personality into the space.

There's a cashless payment terminal at the coffee counter, although it wasn't operational during my visit, I was disappointed.

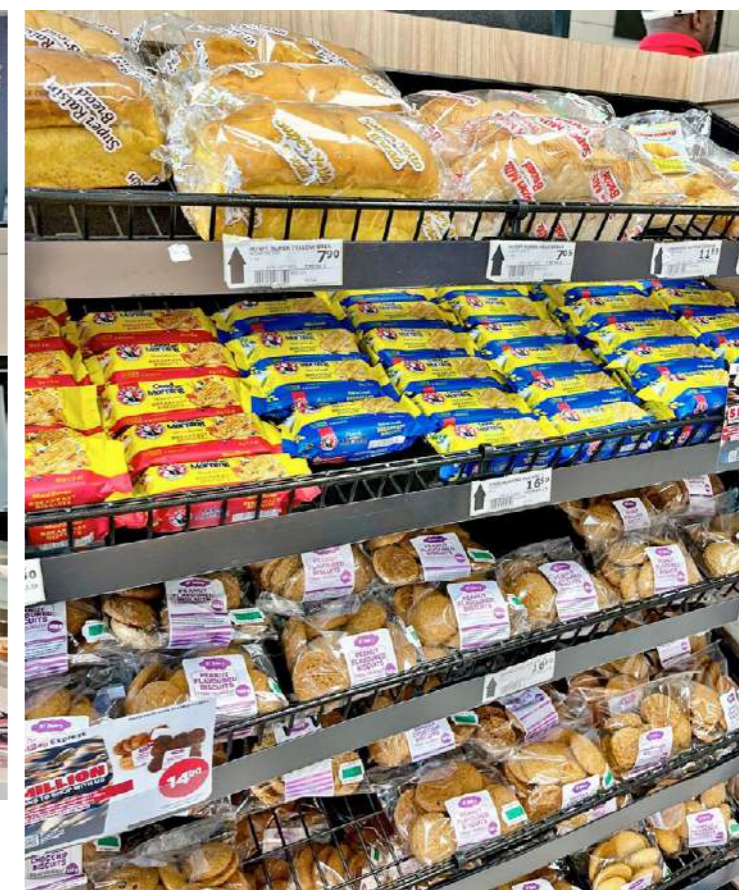
The updated menu introduces a few interesting additions, including Mini Moments (mini sausages with chips) and a Matcha Fix. I'm not a matcha



New logo displayed on the front window is a clean design.



New colour palette creates a more upmarket feel. Cheeky humour adds to the experience. Cashless POS at the coffee counter is a welcome addition especially during peak times when many customers don't want to queue. New menu includes Mini Moments and the Match range, bringing in interest, a bit of dashboard dining without messing in the car and matcha selection.



The range includes a few local SME vendor products.



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fan, but with the chai unavailable on the day, I opted for a Café Mocha instead.

Inside the store, the black header band running around the space ties the store in neatly with the Wild Bean Café colour scheme and helps anchor the visual as you enter.

Low, short aisle shelving supports customer flow and keeps the SKU count under control, which works well for the size of the store. The fresh and pre-packed “pick up and go” fridge is positioned between the front door and the cashier, making it visible and offering a clear alternative to the traditional garage pie. It’s a smart placement that supports convenience led purchasing.

The store has also brought back a basic fresh fruit and vegetable range, catering to customers from the surrounding residential area behind the site. While the range makes sense, I believe that there is a place for more SME localisation on shelf in the future, particularly in a residential catchment where community alignment matters.

One surprise on the site was the presence of a Pedros drive-thru. Chicken QSRs inevitably impact grilled chicken sales in-store, but the convenience store still has an opportunity to compete, not by mirroring national QSR menus, but by offering innovation at a sharper price point and with more creativity. A ‘me too’ menu is difficult to win with, and the same challenge applies when KFC or Nando’s operates at the same location.



The store layout flows comfortably and easily with the short, low shelved aisles. The black banner ties the coffee brand with the rest of the store.



Customers requested the store re-range fresh fruit & vegetables after it was removed from the range during the revamp period. Convenience is a focus, and cut fruit in cups makes it easier to eat in the car and also makes a healthier option available.

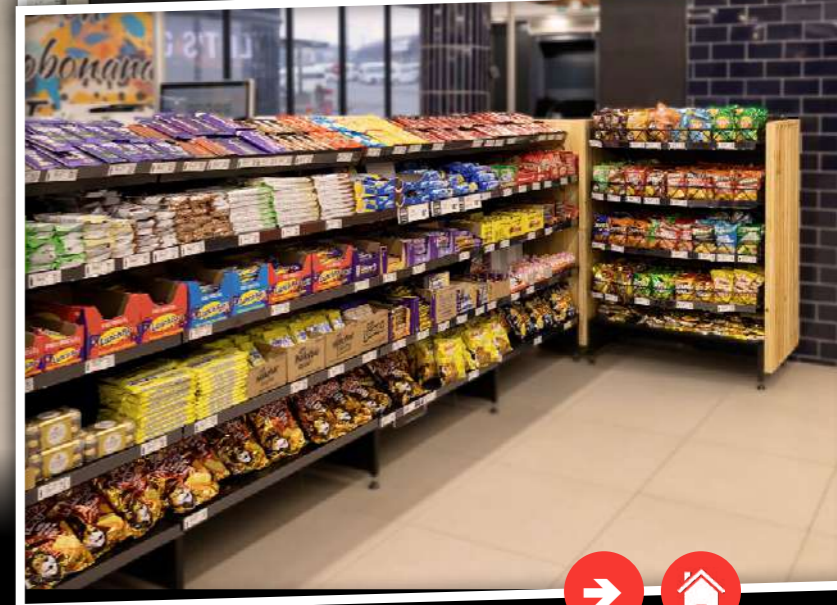


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On the other side of Pretoria is the MBT Petroleum Lynnwood site with its Buzz cafe, located on the busy intersection of Solomon Mahlangu Drive and Lynnwood Road. The site has a car wash and an ATM. No QSR partnerships. The site benefits from its positioning on a high-traffic commuter route. It forms part of MBT Petroleum's network of 35 sites with its head office based in Pretoria. MBT Petroleum is a smaller, locally based petroleum brand that has been operating for over 20 years.

The site underwent an acquisition by OBARO during July 2025, marking a recent change in ownership. I'm keen to see if any diversification will follow. Visually, the yellow and black colour palette is bold and immediately noticeable from the road. The forecourt feels open, and the site includes a comfortable outside covered seating area adjacent to the store.

The convenience store offers a good sized trading space with short aisles and low shelves. On entry, the coffee counter is positioned to the left and incorporates a cashless POS. There are some value-added services available at the cashier's till point. The range goes slightly beyond the basic C's typically found in forecourt stores. It's a safe and functional range, and I wondered if it was strategic discipline or a lack of buying power? In the upright refrigeration units at the back of the store, I noticed some in-store pre-packed takeaway lines, adding some variety to the offering.

One point of difference was the pie offering at the coffee counter, where a different branded pie



The site is on a prime position and the forecourt is clean, neat and spacious



The store has included a freezer for the slushie range and positioned alongside the ice cream freezers at the front of the store for ease of visibility. Because the canopy extends to the front of the store, it keeps the area cool and therefore no risk of the ice cream freezers or chocolates being affected by the heat.



Pretoria is a few temperature degrees hotter than Johannesburg and the covered outside seating gives customers a comfortable area to relax, eat and also take a quick meeting.



A flaky pastry crust pie is a staple in South African c-stores irrespective of the brand used.



Sandwiches presented as 'home-made' and look gourmet. In-store prepared items add variety and convenience and easy to eat in the car.



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was available rather than the brand commonly found across most forecourts (also a flaky pastry). This stood out as a choice within an otherwise familiar forecourt staple. The in-store sandwiches were presented as a gourmet line and looked fresh. A local Centurion SME rusk vendor was given a gondola merchandising space positioned within the coffee purchase zone.

Overall, the store is clean, organised and easy to navigate. It will be interesting to see how the store and range develop over time following the acquisition, particularly as OBARO settles into ownership and defines the next phase for the site.

What stands out when comparing these two sites is the role that scale and structure play in shaping the convenience offer. The bp benefits from a retail partnership, established food brands and a clear visual and operational guide. This brings consistency and confidence, but also introduces the challenge of differentiation in a highly competitive environment. Scale can shape the blueprint, but execution determines whether the basket size and margin grow.

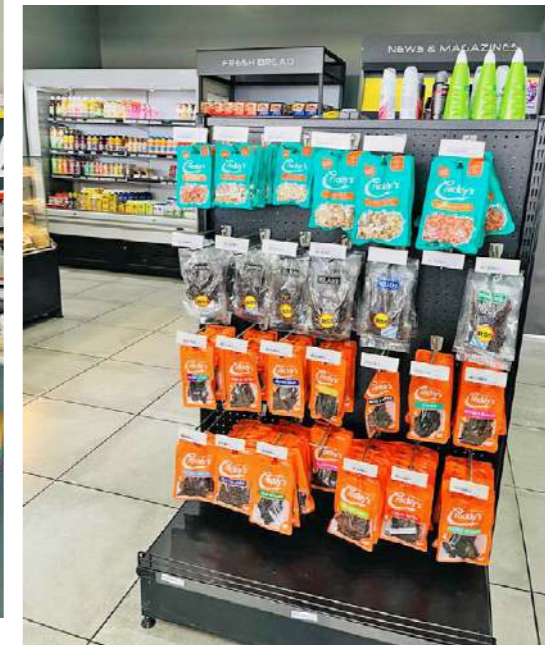
The MBT Petroleum Lynnwood site, by contrast, presents a straightforward offer. Without the backing of a local retail partner, the focus remains on core convenience, selective range extensions and operational simplicity. While the deviations from the standard forecourt format are subtle, they reflect the realities of a local brand operating within a tightly managed footprint.



Local SME vendor is given prime merchandising space close to the coffee counter.



The colour palette and design of the coffee counter is visually appealing.



Biltong is another staple in our c-stores.



The store flows comfortably and it's easy to navigate.

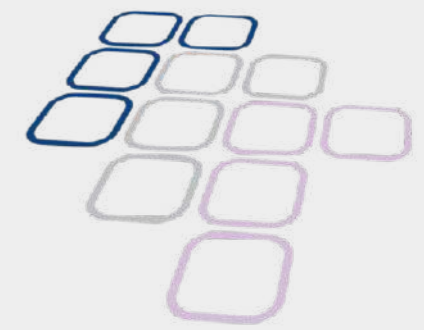


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Together, these sites offer a useful snapshot of where South African forecourt retail currently sits. Progress is often incremental rather than transformational, and success is increasingly defined by execution, context and an understanding of the customer at that specific location and time and of course, the service levels shown by the staff. In a market where both international and local players invest, the c-store remains one of the most telling indicators of how well a brand translates strategy into everyday retail reality. And for the customer standing at the coffee counter or choosing between a pie or a donut, does it matter whether the brand is local or international, or does execution ultimately decide? **SR**



Courier Guy lockers and easy access to wood and charcoal add to the convenience of popping into bp Pick n Pay Express.

Cooldrinks at bp Pick n Pay Express.

Buzz Café checkout.



Muneeba Jaffar is the founder of MSI-J Consulting, driving forecourt convenience store growth and helping SMME vendors become retail ready. Backed by years of retail experience, she offers strategic insight and practical expertise. She can be contacted at [muneeba@msi-jconsulting.co.za](mailto:muneeba@msi-jconsulting.co.za).

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