



Many leisure facilities still use coin-operated lockers, which will need to be adapted for the change in £1 coin

Mint condition

The Royal Mint's new £1 coin has now entered circulation. Tom Walker investigates how prepared the sports and leisure sector is for the change – and how it will affect facility operators, who still have coin-operated lockers and changing rooms

The current £1 coin has been in circulation for more than 30 years and, in that time, has become one of the most counterfeited coins in history. According to figures by Willings, a specialist firm that tests coins for businesses, there are around 75m fake £1 coins currently in circulation – totalling five per cent of the entire stock of 'old' £1 coins.

To eradicate the problem, the Royal Mint launched a new, 12-sided £1 coin on 28 March. Lauded as “the most secure coin in

the world”, the coin boasts several features designed to make it “counterfeit-proof”.

As well as its unique 12-sided appearance, it is made of two metals – nickel-brass and alloy – and has a latent image that acts like a hologram, changing from a ‘£’ symbol to the number ‘1’ when seen from different angles. There are also tiny inscriptions made using micro-letterings on both sides.

While the introduction of the new coin might make it nearly impossible to counterfeit, it will pose a significant

challenge for many UK businesses: how to ensure a smooth transition from old to new. Sports and active leisure sectors are particularly affected, given the high number of facilities that still rely on coin-operated locks, changing room amenities, vending machines and access control devices.

A TIME OF TRANSITION

“The current coin will cease to be legal tender from September 2017,” says Spencer Grimwood, project manager at Crown Sports Lockers. “Now is the time for sports facility operators to finalise preparations for the change to ensure a smooth transition for those using coin-operated lockers.

“There are locks that take old and new £1 coins and can be converted from coin return to coin retain.”

Crown is already supplying coin-operated lockers that accept the new

New £1 coin – what you need to know

- Introduced into circulation on 28 March 2017
- Both the new and old £1 coins will be in circulation until September 2017
- Following the six month co-circulation period, the old £1 coin will no longer be legal tender



Lockers can be converted to accept both old and new coins



LOCKERS



Operators must ensure that customers are not prevented from using lockers during the transition period

Do coins still have a future?

As the world is increasingly digital, do coin-operated locks, vending and access systems have a future?

Bev Sharpe, director, Simple Locking Solutions:

Coin locks are still popular – but their market share is being steadily eroded. Technology is constantly improving and the public now view high tech solutions as standard. They expect simple-to-use products that are robust and reliable. Coin locks can feel dated in some new sites. Ten years ago we probably sold five of our transponder systems – which use a non-contact chip for locking – per year. We are currently installing around five systems a month.

Daniel Jones, sales director, Safe Space Lockers

I think coins will always have a future but also that operators are trying to offer alternative lock mechanisms where possible. It fundamentally will always come down to what sort of facility is operated and the budget. I would say for us, coin mechanisms are still about 10 per cent of our new installations.

coin. Lenzie Golf Club near Glasgow is one of the early adopters, having installed holdall lockers fitted with a dual option lock for its newly refurbished men's changing room.

Philip Lawrence, managing director of Ice Locker Group, adds that the introduction of the new coin – while a challenge – doesn't necessarily mean that operators must overhaul their entire coin-operated stock. "The newly shaped coins won't operate with any lockers that operators have had previously installed" he says. "But there is no need to replace the entirety of locks with newly designed systems. There are modification kits that allow existing lockers to be adapted to suit the new coinage."

Lawrence adds that locker and changing room designers and suppliers have been working on solutions and new products since details of the new coin and its size and dimensions were revealed in early 2016.



There has been a substantial increase in new lock mechanisms in recent months

“THE PRIORITY SHOULD BE TO ENSURE SPORTS AND LEISURE BUSINESSES DO NOT RISK LOCKING THEIR OWN CUSTOMERS OUT AFTER PEOPLE GET RID OF THE OLD £1 COINS

“We started to look at ways that leisure customers could implement the changes necessitated by the introduction of the new £1 coin as smoothly as possible,” he says.

“This involved working closely with the lock manufacturers as well as contacting all of our clients to inform them of the changes and its implications. Among our solutions are locks that accept both the old and new £1 coins, which will definitely make the transition as painless as possible.”

READY FOR CHANGE

While leisure suppliers can offer solutions to deal with the switchover, how ready is the UK’s leisure sector for the new coin? There has been widespread concern in other areas of industry – such as retail – that consumers will come across situations where they will be unable to use their new £1 coins. Supermarket trolleys, photo

booths and parking meters are just a few of the everyday examples where compliance is currently less than 100 per cent.

According to Daniel Jones, UK sales director for Safe Space Lockers, the sports and leisure industry will be no different. “While most operators are now aware of the change and have come up with solutions best suited to their operations, I think there will be teething problems within the first few months,” he says. “Not all locks have been adapted yet, so there will be a period of crossover where people will still need to use the old coin in the locks.”

Crown’s Spencer Grimwood agrees and adds that sports and leisure companies will need to ensure that, as the old coins are phased out, customers who no longer have them will not be prevented from accessing facilities. “The changeover should be smooth, as long as facility operators give

themselves enough time to specify lockers taking the new coin, Grimwood says.

“The priority should be to ensure sports and leisure businesses do not risk locking their own customers out after people get rid of the old £1 coins. Sites may find there are access issues well before September. In this switchover period between March and September, being able to accept old and new £1 coins is the better option to ensure a smooth transition occurs.”

While not every facility is compliant yet, there has been evidence that operators were speeding up their actions, as the time for the introduction of the new coin drew closer.

“We’ve seen a substantial increase in demand for lockers that accept the new £1 coin in recent months,” says Lawrence.

“We expect this rush to continue in the run up to when the phasing out of the old coin is complete, in October.” ●