



The mobile unit consists of a vending machine attached to an electric tricycle | Photo source Unilever

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STARTUP'S PLASTIC-REDUCING REFILL SYSTEM GOES MOBILE IN CHILE

 RETAIL

Algramo's mobile refill unit is focused on reducing plastic consumption by using refillable containers for products like dish soap and washing detergent



Spotted: Chile-based startup Algramo, who Springwise first spotted in 2015 for its vending machines selling bulk staples around Santiago at affordable rates while splitting the profits with shopkeepers, has evolved the concept to include mobile refill units after a successful pilot program last year. This effort is focused on reducing plastic consumption by using refillable containers for products like dish soap and washing detergent.

The mobile unit consists of a vending machine attached to an electric tricycle, which moves to different parts of the city. The reusable containers are equipped with an RFID code that provides discounts on future purchases, which helps encourage citizens to participate.

“We offer a solution where we decouple consumption from packaging waste,” said Algramo’s Brian Bauer. “There’s a lot of that packaging that ends up in the environment, ultimately, in oceans or other

places it shouldn't be.”

Algramo partnered with Unilever on the mobile unit project, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were plans for the startup to bring its services into the US this year. This developed after an investment by [Closed Loop Ventures](#). The fund invests in a variety of circular economy startups.

Since we first covered Algramo over five years ago, the startup has gone from around 300 installed vending machines to now being in more than 2,000 bodegas in Santiago alone. It also boasts an 80 per cent reuse rate of its packaging, which was around just 10 per cent in the early days of operation.

This innovation is brought to you by Plastic Odyssey, an expedition across 3 continents that will reach areas most affected by plastic pollution and develop local solutions. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Written By: Justin Sablich

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Email: contacto@algramo.cl

Website: algramo.com

Takeaway:

Algramo is showing how a great idea can evolve from having a minimal, localised impact into something with a much wider reach. This is evident in its ability to attract the attention of major brands like Unilever and Purina, and investors that have made its pending expansion into the US possible. Given the urgency of the global plastic waste problem, this is heartening news. To highlight this issue further: Out of the 9.2 billion tonnes of plastic ever made, **6.9 billion tonnes is waste** — and 91 per cent of that has never been recycled.