

# Are Washroom Dispenser Systems Expensive? The True Costs Explained

Are dispensers actually ever free? How do you compare sheet count v meterage? Direct savings explained and indirect savings uncovered. What you can expect to pay in 2022 and what you must consider before buying...



# Are Washroom Dispenser Systems Expensive? The True Costs Explained

If you're looking at installing a new, or upgrading an existing washroom area, you're probably looking at the different types of dispensers - and dispensing systems – that are available on the market.

One of the most common questions we get asked is, *'how much will a system cost?'*

One of the most common answers is, *'it depends, let's do a trial first and see how it works for you before we discuss pricing'.*

Frustrating isn't it, when all you're really wanting to know is the installation costs and ongoing ownership costs.

**In this article we tell you what the true costs of having a washroom dispenser system are to help you make the best decision.**

We've split it into the following sections:

1. Clarifying points around free dispensers and the murky world of 'sheet count' and 'meterage' comparisons.
2. What savings you could realistically expect to make on the three main washroom systems.
3. Other indirect savings you can expect from using a washroom system.
4. How much you would expect to pay in 2022 for a washroom system.
5. The five things to consider when costing up dispensers.

**If time isn't on your side, skip to the bottom of this article to crunch the numbers!**

## Section 1: Let's discuss the topics of free dispensers and 'sheet count' versus 'meterage', which can be confusing...

### Free dispensers – are they actually free or is there a catch?

If you've been offered free dispensers you should expect some sort of supplier agreement where you're tied into buying the paper or soap consumables for a period of time; typically 12 to 36 months.

This is because there is a cost to the manufacturer or distributor for these dispensers, which will usually be recouped over the length of the contract by the profit made from selling the consumables.

If you're offered free dispensers **without a contract** this could mean the dispenser is designed to take a specific refill and by default the supplier has you in a 'supply agreement' because you can only buy the genuine refill from them.

In summary, free dispensers are actually supplied (and usually installed) with no cost to you, but you should be prepared to enter into a supply agreement with the installer.

Supply agreements can vary but typically will include a lifetime warranty on the dispensers and sometimes a pricing lockout or supply chain guarantee for the duration of the contract. It is in the best interest of the supplier to honour the contract so, in most cases, it's a low risk option – although unprecedented supply chain demands, such as were seen in early 2020, can cause challenges.

The other option is to purchase the system dispensers but often these are supplied at an inflated cost, so it doesn't always make sense for large washroom areas.

### If you're trying to compare sheet count versus meterage or vice versa, it's difficult to work out comparative costings – what is the trick?

One of the most frustrating things you'll come across when trying to compare systems or system products to generic consumables, such as mini jumbo toilet rolls, is trying to work out if an '800 sheet roll' is going to be more cost effective than a '400 meter jumbo roll'. Sometimes this can be seen as a clever marketing ploy to make it seem you're buying more than you really are.

## There is no black or white answer...

That's because you are comparing apples to pears, not apples to apples.

If you're looking at jumbo rolls at £15.00/case and a system product at £30.00 plus per case, you'd probably write off the system product as being very expensive compared to what you're currently buying. You could be both right and wrong here!

### System products are developed to solve a problem.

If you solve that problem you could actually be saving yourself a tonne of money compared to using generic products. If you're comparing price per meterage, or price per roll, then expect the cost of a system product to cost more *in theory* every time.

However...

*If you're prepared to look a little deeper and understand what extra benefits a washroom dispenser system will give you, then you'll be well on the way to understanding what true savings you can make.*

At this point, it's often useful to request a trial of the dispensers you're considering, to run a comparison against your existing products – this can be the best way to work out the savings and advantages. After all, a washroom dispenser change can be a big time commitment, so it's prudent to test first.

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## Section 2: I've been told that I'll save 30 % if I switch to a new system, is this correct?

In this section we'll explain how savings are calculated, and what you could actually expect to save on the different washroom systems.

Being totally up front, it's almost impossible to put a number on the amount you could save when installing a washroom system because there are so many variables. What we can share are the figures we've seen from the many systems we've supplied in the market.

### 1) Hand care systems

These are easiest to accurately forecast a saving on because the dosing is so controllable.

If one dispenser system is dispensing half the amount of product to another then you'll see about a 50 % reduction in consumption, and that can translate to anything from a straight 50 % cost saving to something like 25-35 % saving depending on the cost of the refills.

You could save up to 50 % in cost on your current supply, but a more realistic target would be 20-30 % if you're currently using a bulk fill system, and 10-15 % if you're looking to go to a more efficient cartridge system.

### 2) Paper hand towel systems

These are the second easiest washroom systems to forecast savings on, again, because it's easier to control what the consumer uses.

For example, if you're comparing a roll towel system to a standard paper towel system, you will be able to control the amount of sheets the end user takes, work out an average across your site, and do the sums that way.

It can still be confusing when you're comparing a roll which has no pre-perforated sheets and a pack of towels that has, say 3600 or 5000 individual sheets.

To accurately compare, you need to understand the sheet length of both your current product and the system product you are comparing against. A big factor to also consider is the waste produced by a paper hand towel system.

We would expect a roll towel system to save up to 25 % on costs when compared to a c fold or z fold paper towel system. Savings will be more marginal if you are looking to replace an existing paper roll towel system with another roll towel system.

As a rule of thumb, 'blue roll' or centrefeed systems and c fold or v fold type paper towels are the most wasteful, therefore the most costly, whereas a paper roll towel through a dispenser that controls sheet length is usually the most cost effective, especially in high traffic washrooms.

### 3) Toilet tissue systems

This is the least easy area to do accurate cost comparisons and where the most perceived trickery and smoke and mirrors stuff happens.

Ironically, it's probably the most important area to focus on when you're doing budgeting or cost comparisons because it's usually where the most product usage is – unless you're in the food and beverage industry, where it probably comes second to paper towel usage.

**To work out cost savings on toilet tissue systems, you really need to understand what problem you are solving and the costs associated with that problem...**

Take for example a jumbo toilet tissue – it's a great price point for a high meterage roll, and when compared like for like with a system product, you just won't be able to make the sums work.

However, some of the common problems associated with a jumbo toilet tissue system are:

- Excessive consumption (the dispenser freely dispenses plus the sheet length tends to be long).
- Waste from core stubs (very rarely do jumbo rolls get completely used, there's generally around 20 % wastage).
- Drain blockages (remember – cheap paper is probably recycled, which is great but it contains a lot of binding agent, so doesn't break down as quickly in drains and can contribute to blockages).

A system, such as a single sheet system or specifically designed multi roll system, that reduces consumption, decreases drain blockages and has little or no waste will consequently be considerably more cost effective in the long run. You should expect to pay around the same, or maybe slightly more, than a low-cost generic paper toilet tissue, but you should be able to achieve a total cost-in-use saving of 15-20 %, and we have seen total cost-in-use reductions of 30-40 %.

## Section 3: What are the ‘indirect savings’ that can be made by switching to a dispenser system? I’m sceptical...

Sometimes it can be difficult to separate fact from fiction when it comes to ‘other cost savings’ so we are going to break it down into the different areas that could create indirect cost savings.

### 1) Reducing waste

A single roll jumbo type system is often wasteful. This is because your replenishment schedule should replace the jumbo roll before it’s completely used up. Have empty toilet tissue dispensers and you have a problem...

On average, rolls are replaced when they’re around 80 % used, meaning there is roughly 20 % waste by using a single roll system. Using a twin or multi roll system negates this waste aspect, so you can be sure that you are actually using all that you paid for.

This applies for paper towels too, especially if you consider the amount of waste created by washroom users and the significant cost associated with disposing the waste. If you can reduce the amount of paper towels that are dispensed using a controlled system, you win on both reducing the amount used and the amount you have to dispose of.

Single roll toilet tissue systems, bulk pack toilet tissue and ‘household’ toilet tissue are the most wasteful, and therefore can cost the most ‘in use’. Multi roll systems and single sheet dispensers can cost the least ‘in use’ because firstly each roll is used in entirety, and secondly because the user is restricted to what they can take.

Generic paper hand towels and centrefeed roll are the most wasteful from a cost-in-use perspective, whereas a controlled roll system is the least wasteful, and therefore can cost the least.

### 2) Using system products can reduce expensive drain blockages

Drain blockages are expensive, whether you deal with them in house or have to call in a drain rodding company. They can also cause expensive repair damage to washrooms if the toilets overflow, to say nothing of the issues they cause for washroom users.

Things that toilet tissue systems give you, like single sheet dispensing, shorter sheet lengths, pure pulp tissue that breaks down quicker, can have a significant impact on the occurrence of drain blockages. Whilst we understand that there are a few other causes for drain blockages too (!), paper is still a significant cause, especially in recurring problem areas.

There is also the cost of either on site facilities staff time or external drain companies' costs, which are not insignificant. You absolutely should offset these 'hidden' or not so hidden costs when considering a toilet tissue system.

### 3) Dispenser systems can save you time

Multi roll systems are often designed to give the highest capacity of toilet tissue possible in a dispenser. How does this save time? Well, if you're having to spend time replenishing toilet rolls in a busy washroom, this takes time, which is clearly money.

**If you could double the amount of toilet tissue available in the cubicle, then you could in effect reduce the amount of service visits by 50%,** which is no insignificant amount if you have a large site, or large number of toilet cubicles.

In fact, going for a 'smart' dispenser system can mean that you know in real time which dispensers need refilling, which means you can have a very efficient maintenance schedule. Whilst these systems are not currently too widespread, it's certainly the way things are going and makes good sense for high volume sites.

And there's more.... In fact, dispensing systems each have their own unique ways of combining the above and more, which means that you need to be aware of the benefits that each system could offer you, and probably have some idea of what problem it is you're wanting to resolve before deciding.

[Contact us to request a copy of our free guide to washroom systems and how they solve problems.](#)



## Section 4: In conclusion... are dispensing systems expensive? How much will one cost me?

If you've read all of the above and you're still not sure what a dispenser system will cost you, or have jumped straight to this section, then here's what you should expect to pay in 2022, in the UK.

- **Non-system plastic dispensers** - £10-15/each, depending on the type of dispenser. Some larger dispensers may be more, other, eg soap dispensers, less.
- **Non-system consumables** - £12-19 per case for jumbo and mini jumbo rolls, £15-25 per case for hand towels and anywhere around £5-7 per 5ltr of generic hand soap.
- **System plastic dispensers** – usually supplied free of charge, but likely to be tied to a supply agreement or contract for between 12-36 months. Typically there will be a sliding scale fee for dispensers that come off contract early or if the contract is terminated, and you should expect to give 90 days notice should you want to terminate the agreement before the completion date.
- **System plastic dispensers to buy** – if you want to buy system dispensers and have no contract, this is usually possible. Expect to pay somewhere in the region of £20.00 for toilet tissue dispensers, £38.00 and above for roll towel dispensers, £10-20 for hand care dispensers, and anywhere from £30-60 for an automatic system hand care dispenser.
- **System consumables** – this is a bit of an open ended topic, but you could expect to pay between £0.95 and £1.50 per roll (bear in mind not all box sizes are the same, you could be looking at 24 in a box or 36 or something else).

You might expect to pay between £2.50 – 4.60 per roll for a single sheet dispensing system (note, these can come in different pack sizes too – 6 or 12 being the most popular, but they also come in half length rolls for smaller dispensers) and you would expect to pay something in the region of £7-10 for a soap refill, and £9-13 for a sanitiser refill.

- **Warranties and guarantees** – you shouldn't expect to get any warranty on a generic dispenser that is purchased. You should expect to get a contract lifetime warranty on a system dispenser if you have signed up to a supply agreement, although this would usually be void in cases of vandalism etc.

- System dispensers sometimes carry their own warranties ranging from 1 year to 5 years. More often than not a good distributor will replace dispensers free of charge if there is good throughput of paper products.
- **Metal dispensers** – there are not a huge amount of metal dispensers available to use system products through, which is why we have not included them on this comparison. Tork produce a stainless steel SmartOne dispenser for their single sheet system – you should expect to pay around £70-100 per dispenser for these products.

Expect to pay considerably more than plastic for a good quality steel dispenser, although there are less expensive ones available. Typically most of these would use non system consumables.

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## Section 5: Five things to consider when costing up

- 1) Understand what problems you want to solve, and how much these problems are currently costing you.
- 2) Look carefully at any proposed contracts – in most cases you will be best off signing an agreement, but it pays to do your homework.
- 3) Be careful when you're comparing products to each other – apples aren't the same as pears!
- 4) Consider running a trial of one or several washroom systems to see which one works the best for your particular site.
- 5) Speak to an expert. There are many washroom system suppliers that will give good honest advice, and often a site visit or audit is a good way to kick off.

[Contact us to request a washroom audit for your school, warehouse or other high usage establishment.](#)

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