

Q&A

Q&A No. 1

What factors are the most important to you when selecting foodservice equipment?

Carl Sobocinski

*Restaurateur, Owner, Table 301, Greenville, SC
NRA Board Member*



For me, numbers one and two would be performance and price. As our managers and chefs bring me equipment requests and ideas, I encourage them to specify performance—how it's going to stand up compared to what they're currently using, how it's going to last and its durability—and then tell me the price. Space and energy efficiency are also important, but we start by first looking at performance and price.

Additionally, I can't overemphasize the importance of the relationships I have with my vendors and the trust that builds overtime. As we're looking to make changes in our kitchens, we consult with our local restaurant equipment supplier; then, using his recommendations, our chefs and managers conduct additional research and present me with their choices. A lot of it goes back to relationships with me, which speaks to the business we're in — the hospitality business. I want people to come back to the restaurant year after year. I have that same philosophy with my vendors; if it's not broke, we're going to continue to have this relationship.

Mike Walpole

Senior Manager, Supplier Sourcing, Chick-fil-A, Inc., Atlanta, GA



Size and space requirements are critical, especially as Chick-fil-A moves into urban areas and we need to figure out how to do twice as much in half the space. It's the chief concern of our production design group, followed by energy, which is always big, and then followed by speed.

The life cycle cost is also very significant because that tells me about service after the sale, the quality of the equipment and the ease of use. Service plays a key role in our decision-making process. If a company does not have after-sale support, we're just really not interested in working with them — that's a deal-breaker. Because of these factors, life cycle value is more important to us rather than solely the initial purchase price.

Tarun Malik, Ed.D.

President
Johnson & Wales University, Charlotte, NC



First is price — with 19 kitchens and lots of equipment, we have to be very careful with our capital expenses. Culinary is only one of our cost centers, and we have to weigh the needs of all departments. Reliability is also a consideration. Over time we have learned to balance cutting edge and reliability, erring on the side of reliability. Finally, service is very important to us — we have a dedicated team to keep things working and call in the reserves as needed.

Our contracts with equipment service companies also help to minimize downtime. We are in a big market so access to technicians is not an issue, but for operations in smaller, more remote locations, operators may need to choose lower tech, uncomplicated equipment to address this challenge.

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