

Chris's Corner: Technology in Food Equipment

Even after being in business for over 25 years, the rate of change in the technology of equipment still amazes me.

Even the most mundane, or theoretically run of the mill machine, over the course of time has had engineering upgrades to make it more reliable, more efficient, easier to operate or easier to maintain.

If you have been in business for a while, sooner or later you are going to be faced with replacing an existing machine or perhaps investing in a new machine that you need because of a replacement need, menu change or operational change. When you do, you are going to be faced with a multitude of choices in features for the same basic machine. My friend, an oven is just not an oven and a dishwasher isn't either.

One thing I tell people when making buying decisions is that at the end of the day, whatever product you are doing is going to basically be the same. If you are frying French fries in a fryer, whether you do it in 20 year old fryer or a brand new one, the end product will basically be the same.

The difference is how you get there. A new fryer may be more energy efficient, because of a better design. It could be more user friendly because of a timer that tells you when the product is done. It could be even more user friendly because of an integrated timer that works in conjunction with automatic basket lifts; so that when the timer kicks off the product is removed from the oil and the cooking process is stopped and you don't burn and waste product. It might have an integrated oil filtration system to enhance the life of your oil or make filtration an easier or safer process.

With in the ultimate in sophistication, you have computer programmed controls where you have a list of products programmed into the system; so that for each product you do you have a time and temperature. The operator selects "fries" and the fryer adjusts temperature to the product, drops the basket, cooks the

product and stops the cycle, raising the basket upon completion. It will tell you when to filter the oil, based upon the number of cycles ran. Pretty high tech.

So faced with the multitude of choices for the same basic machine, how do you decide? The simple answer is you have to weigh the costs with benefit. You have to analyze areas that are problematic to your operation and see what feature will solve the problems you have.

Technology is not free. Using the example of a simple fryer, a basic no frills, cold steel tanked, standing pilot 40 pound fryer might cost under a \$1,000.00. Now compare that to a 40 pound fryer with computerized controls, electronic ignition, integrated basket lifts and built-in oil filtration you could easily invest over \$5,000.00 and at the end of the day. Remember, for the most part, the products coming out of both of these fryers are pretty indistinguishable from each other; French fries.

Why did someone buy the expensive one?

- They invested in computer controls for product consistency and reduced training time for new employees
- They invested in auto basket lifts to reduce burnt and wasted product
- They invested in built in filtration for safety, product quality and to enhance the life of the cooking oil

All the bells and whistles have a purpose and the question you have to ask yourself is “are they solving a problem that I have?”

Bear in mind too, technology effects your service cost over time. A bare bones fryer is relatively simple in design. You have a heat source, consisting of a thermostat, element or burner and a frying vessel or tank. Compare that to the state of the art with computer boards, energy efficient designs, mechanically complicated basket lifts and filtration systems that can and will fail and you can understand why the can and often do cost more to repair.

At the end of the day, as you do or should be doing, you need to look at your upfront investment and your anticipated maintenance and repair cost over time. Compare that to the needs you have or will have and try to make a decision.

It is not a simple process, but a necessary one. Part of what we do is help you walk through the decision. We are aware of many of these factors and will help you identify needs you may have or benefits you might realize by investing in new equipment technology. We will help you through the decision and we ultimately wouldn't sell you something that we wouldn't invest in ourselves.

Any time you are faced with this type of decision don't hesitate to call us. You are being short sighted if you go from one extreme to the other. One machine truly doesn't meet every customer's need or there wouldn't be so many choices.