

Chris's Corner: Play it smart

It is pretty stunning how leading-edge technology makes its way into the most mundane or common place of products.

Sometimes, I personally think, it might be a matter of over engineering or over thinking a product to differentiate itself in the market. How sophisticated does something have to be before the complication in using it outweighs the benefit?

Other times the technology takes an older product that may have been difficult or confusing to use and makes it simpler. I am not sure if a TV remote is a good example or not, but once you have it set up and have familiarized yourself on how to use it, it is pretty neat how you can find what you want to watch by a few well selected words spoken into a built in microphone on the remote. Pretty slick.

Be it vehicles, appliances or commercial food equipment, all are increasingly sophisticated. With this sophistication comes many user benefits, but the ease of maintenance and repair of the things in also increasingly complicated and potentially expensive.

I don't know whether it is by strategy or happenstance, but today's vehicles, other than the most routine of maintenance, are difficult to work on for the average shade tree mechanic.

Additionally, due to the need for unique tools and diagnostic equipment which either are only available to the certified dealerships or are very expensive are often out of reach for an independent garage or mechanic.

You by, circumstance or design, are forced to take your vehicle to a dealership for many repairs.

Is this a good thing or a bad thing? I can't say for sure, but if the dealer has the tools, equipment and training to do a quality job at a fair price and keep your vehicle on the road, it is a matter of necessity. After investing in a high priced new or used car or truck, you have to keep it running.

I guess the point may be that you can not drive an expensive vehicle, feature laden and with all the bells and whistles, and expect you won't spend money on repairs and maintenance. It doesn't work that way.

Today's commercial foodservice equipment is getting more technically advanced and complex regularly. Customer demands for water efficiency, energy efficiency, higher productivity and easier to use controls have driven this new era.

With increased technology, service training and specialized tools and equipment, much like the auto industry, has made repairs more difficult for owners and repair businesses without access to the proper resources.

The important thing I want to convey is that the changes in complexity to the food machines is based on customer demand for features and benefits of the equipment. This is not engineering for engineering sake.

Often times these new feature rich machines are a slightly higher investment than machines with older technology; they do cost more. However, the cost of ownership over the life of the machine, in conjunction with labor savings and higher productions, justify the higher initial investment.

In order to reap the benefits of a lower cost of ownership over the life of the machine, it is critical the owner of the equipment perform routine maintenance and have a qualified service company do repairs on the machine. Cutting corners to save money typically leads to premature failure and replacement of the machine and they will fail to have a lower cost of ownership because the life cycle is drastically reduced.

I have seen customers buy dishwashers that cost in excess of \$100,000.00, only to have their inhouse maintenance departments fix the machine when out of warranty. These machines should last over 15 years.

We just replaced one last year that was 7 years old and had been self-maintained. We have similar models in the field where the customers have a service contract with us on the machine and they are over 20 years old. Expert service prolongs the life of a machine.

The takeaway from this story is that if you invest in the latest technology and you pay a premium for it, you had better protect your investment by taking care of it during its life span. Otherwise don't make the investment in a machine if you are not willing to invest in its up keep.

My father once looked at Mercedes car. He asked the salesman how much an oil change from the service department would typically cost. The salesman said if you can't afford the oil change, you can't afford a Mercedes. I think my father bought an Oldsmobile 88.