

Making Sense Of Maintenance Costs

I read with interest Brian's June editorial entitled "Knocking Down Ongoing Costs" and felt compelled to add some observations of my own.

It is a myth that manufacturers and service agents can track maintenance costs. Only operators themselves can develop these figures.

The logical, scientific approach to understanding maintenance costs requires following a sample group of like equipment over a period of usage. All repairs and maintenance performed would be recorded and analyzed to determine causality, as many breakdowns are caused by unique circumstances in which the equipment is not at fault.

Data at the factory or service agency level doesn't cut it for these reasons:

- ◆ Foodservice equipment doesn't have odometers. To understand repair and maintenance costs, you need to know usage, not age.
- ◆ Warranty billing only reflects equipment that requires repair. Manufacturers see no information on the vast majority of new equipment that doesn't require repair.
- ◆ Many "warranty repairs" are sales concessions, the repair due to operator or installation error. These are not maintenance costs; they are situational costs.
- ◆ Service companies are typically called upon to make repairs only as needed. Again, they have no information on the equipment that doesn't require repair.
- ◆ For most operators, servicers are chosen by local management who will often call multiple service companies over the life of equipment.

The fundamental issues that must be considered in determining maintenance costs are location, installation, menu and operating personnel.

- ◆ How will the fact that a convection oven lasts for years longer in a school cafeteria than it would in a restaurant be handled in maintenance data?
- ◆ If a kitchen manager runs the top burners of a range through the dishwasher every week, causing service calls to replace air shutters that would otherwise outlast the range itself, should those repair costs be reflected in maintenance data?
- ◆ How will the effect of regional water differences on steamer maintenance be considered?
- ◆ What about the kitchen that uses highly acidic barbeque sauce in its combination steamer/ovens?

Only the end users of the equipment are in a position to provide all the information necessary to understand the cost of maintaining their equipment. And more importantly, their data will likely be of limited value to operators whose region, menu and style of operation are significantly different.

I believe that operators would get bigger savings from studying why maintenance and repair costs differ at the unit level and develop in-house "best practices" for keeping their equipment longer. It's not the equipment that drives the cost, it's the setting in which the equipment is used.

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