

Collaboration Key to Driving Efficiencies

Generally speaking, we were all accustomed to lower energy costs. Energy was much cheaper and more available 25 years ago compared to the current environment. And as the world gets more complicated and our resources get more divided, it will become very important to be efficient.

When closely looking at the introduction of European equipment to the North American market, you see a larger percentage of energy-efficient products. That's because the Europeans are from parts of the world where energy has not been as plentiful. This is similar to what we saw in the 1970s when the influx of Asian car makers affected the way the U.S. automobile companies went to market.

The good news is that there appears to be plenty of new and creative ways that foodservice operators can work with their supply chain partners to save energy. Some manufacturers have become more efficient. Hoods, for example, have sensors that detect heat and smoke levels and ramp up when appropriate to keep a space cool and vented. If you can manage and harness that energy at an efficient level, that's where money is going to be saved.

It's very unique the way the industry is changing at this point. The old-school restaurateurs, with so much knowledge about cooking techniques, are starting to change their way of thinking. It used to be that the chef would come in and turn on the burners first thing in the morning but would not cook anything for hours. I think today, you do have a more aware operator than you had years ago, and they are changing wasteful approaches like this. That's because they have to fully embrace the notion that behind the scenes is where the

biggest expense of the operation resides. A restaurant still has to keep everything at the ready for when that customer comes in the door, but there are more efficient ways to approach this.

What we have found is that the more experienced or established operators will be more open to the conversation. As a general rule, these are foodservice operators that have made it more than three years. Up to that point, their main goal is to establish a foothold for their business. After they reach a certain point, you can talk to them because they have history.

It's not important to provide them with only energy-efficient equipment. Equally important is efficient design. So, equipment suppliers should offer and foodservice operator customers should demand a good design with equipment that's multifunctional and saves energy. Projects with those goals should get both parties' attention. You may have to pay a little more up front but you will get it back through the energy and labor efficiencies generated. If you can take a kitchen that normally operates with four people and make it operate proportionally with three people or two people, this is another way to reduce your operating costs and generate savings.

None of this will matter, though, if foodservice operators and their suppliers don't recognize the value associated with designing a kitchen that's energy- and labor-efficient. Just as importantly, they have to understand the process is a collaborative one. The customer has to sit there and share information to allow their partner to work on your behalf.

The concept of efficiency remains more than exciting. It's crucial to the future success of our industry.



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