

FSR

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Restaurant

SMARTS



Kitchen Makeovers

Is your kitchen feeling a little dated, less efficient perhaps? A smarter kitchen almost always has a smaller footprint, better equipment, and less waste.

THINKSTOCK

COOKING UP A KITCHEN STRATEGY 56

FLEXIBILITY FIXES GROWING PAINS 58

CHICAGO SHOW AND TELL 62

MATTERS OF TASTE (AND BEYOND) 64



SIMPLY ADDING MORE EQUIPMENT TO AN OVER-CROWDED KITCHEN IS NOT THE SOLUTION. INSTEAD, REPLACING EQUIPMENT WITH INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES CAN ENABLE KITCHEN STAFF TO WORK MORE EFFICIENTLY AND, IN SOME CASES, ALLOW THE KITCHEN TO OPERATE IN A SMALLER FOOTPRINT.

MANITOWOC FOODSERVICE

Cooking Up a Kitchen Strategy

Make it smaller, smarter, taller, and more efficient. *By Christa Gala*

An aging kitchen could well be the ultimate Catch 22 for a full-service restaurant—victim of the proverbial “if it’s working, don’t fix it” mentality because the fix can be quite costly and disruptive to operations.

“A lot of kitchens were designed years ago,” says Mark Richardson, vice president of strategic and global accounts at Manitowoc Foodservice. “Operators often try to fit new items into existing equipment, which can be limiting, or add new equipment to an already crowded kitchen without any thought to streamlining or organization.”

The result is a crowded, unsafe workspace that doesn’t work efficiently.

Step One: A Smaller Footprint

Manitowoc Foodservice employs a High-Performance Kitchen team to help operators reduce their kitchen footprint by changing equipment or adopting new technology while still maintaining, or even increasing, what a kitchen puts out.

“The smaller the kitchen, the more space you’re going to have for serving customers,” says Richardson. “Our High-Performance Kitchen team will

conduct time and motion studies, look at the menu, and really understand the current state of a kitchen.

“They’ll take that model and rearrange or redesign the kitchen,” he continues. “That could mean developing workstations so the staff doesn’t have to go all over the place to make one dish, or it might mean looking at specific equipment. Maybe by replacing three or four pieces of equipment, the kitchen [evolves] into a smaller footprint.”

This is easier to accomplish with equipment that does double duty—such as Manitowoc’s Merrychef eikon series

Manitowoc
page 57

RESTAURANT SMARTS KITCHEN MAKEOVERS



CHEFS WANT TO BE ABLE TO SWITCH EQUIPMENT EASILY AND WITH GREATER FLEXIBILITY.

THINKSTOCK

Meals on Wheels: Modular Units are Easy

Outgrowing a kitchen is a common occurrence for full-service restaurants as menu changes and new technologies often beg for modernization. Sometimes older equipment simply doesn't work the way it used to, and operators often lament that the hodgepodge of old and new equipment in a kitchen provides a visual timeline of the changes they've gone through—when really the ideal would be to have kitchens that evolved and transformed with seamless flexibility.

"Chefs want to be able to switch out pieces of equipment as needed," says Mark Brenner, vice president of sales for The Eagle Group. "For example, they would love to have the ability to switch refrigerators or replace hot food tables by wheeling one in and another out."

A modular counter can provide this type of flexibility, and Brenner's company produces a custom-built Premium Modular Counter (PMC). "This counter provides the flexibility that most operators are looking for, and can be designed to accommodate various types of roll-in equipment, including hot food tables, pizza prep tables, sandwich refrigerators, and under-counter holding cabinets," Brenner says.

Shelves, sink sections, and worktop areas are available as well, and the electrical components are user-friendly, carrying both NSF and UL labels. "The PMC counters come pre-wired to a load center so that when it's installed there only needs to be one final connection for both plumbing and electrical," says Brenner.

of speed ovens, which grill, broil, toast, and steam. "You could possibly eliminate three or four conventional pieces of equipment, saving money in overall design and also reducing the footprint of the kitchen," says Richardson.

Combi-steam ovens, which often use both convection and steam to bake, roast, even cook overnight, can also reduce kitchen footprints.

Another incentive for introducing new equipment is that operators may add things to the menu that were previously overruled due to lack of space.

"Space is always something that's very important to a restaurateur whether you have a small tavern or a large restaurant," says Rod Jones, marketing communications specialist at Broaster Company. With that in mind, the number following each model of Broaster ventless fryers corresponds with the width of the machine: The Broaster 1600 is just 16 inches wide.

"They're very thin machines when they go inline, yet they can produce a tremendous amount of product within that footprint," says Jones.

That small footprint contains costs as well. "Space under a hood is expensive," says Chad Vendette, director of marketing for Broaster. "For every foot added for a ventilation hood, it's thousands of dollars."

Think Vertical

What drives an operator to finally take the plunge to renovate a kitchen is usually a big menu change, says Art Delorenzo, vice president of marketing and product management at Unified Brands. "Typically, they're trying to expand their menu, trying to add dollars to each ticket," he says. "In almost every case, a menu change means they have to find space in the kitchen to take on more product and they are trying to maximize the space they have available."

His recommendation to achieve a smaller footprint is to rethink the existing space, utilizing it both horizontally and vertically.

"In the past, if operators needed more condiments on the top for more variety, they would just keep adding left-to-right space," says Delorenzo. "But as we start to reinvent kitchens, we need to figure out how

Broaster
page 59

RESTAURANT SMARTS KITCHEN MAKEOVERS

to compress that left-to-right space.”

You can do this with both refrigeration units and ovens by expanding capacity front to back on the pan rails to make room for an extra row of pans, thus reducing left-to-right space without giving up any pans.

“If the restaurant really has a space constraint, we can actually double-tier the pan capacity and put in a second level of pans above the first level,” adds Delorenzo.

He also suggests taking ground-level items and attaching them to the wall at 36 to 42 inches, effectively out of the way but still usable. Don’t underestimate storage solutions either. In a smaller footprint, a kitchen must be organized with a designated home for every utensil, condiment, and pan.

Additionally, if a smaller footprint in the kitchen enables more tables in the dining area, then kitchen processes must be evaluated to achieve optimum efficiency within that footprint. “I’ve never been in a kitchen that was slow,” says Vendette. “I think it’s a mantra. The faster they can move and produce, the less time they have to spend doing other things.”

Conserve Energy, Promote Safety

Ten years ago, operators might not have given much thought to energy costs, but, like food prices, those costs are rising.

“Energy costs are significantly more expensive today than they were 10 or even five years ago,” says Vendette. “The cost of doing business has gone up, but I’m not sure that [restaurant] prices have been able to keep pace.”

“That energy pressure, from a food production standpoint, is top of mind for a full-service operator—whether they are buying a piece of equipment, setting up a new restaurant, or taking over an old one,” continues Vendette. “We believe one of the paramount pieces is how to [operate a kitchen] with the least cost of energy.”

Mark Pumphret, national sales manager for Hatco Corporation, says ventilation is critical, and the company recently put a CaptiveAire ventilation hood in its test kitchen.

“The smarter operators are recognizing the advantages of equipment that runs cooler,” says Pumphret. “Maybe it comes from better insulation, maybe there’s a capture-based system. By keeping the kitchen cooler and not having to do a roof penetration for a vent-less system, the restaurant is not exhausting as much air out of the building.”

Pumphret, who used to don a chef’s coat, says cooler temperatures are almost always preferable in kitchens. It’s not only a matter of energy, but also safety. “I’ve cooked in kitchens where the temperature was over 110 degrees Fahrenheit,” he says. “If you’ve got a range in front of your face that’s cranked to run at 700 degrees, and it’s a hot, humid summer day, and the exhaust system is really old and inefficient, then you can imagine what it feels like. We actually had to watch our employees to make sure they didn’t pass out on us.”

Michael Morgan, sales development manager with CaptiveAire Systems concurs that the most common issues he addresses with operators are performance, kitchen comfort,

and energy efficiency. Among the key questions he asks: “How well is the ventilation system performing in terms of capturing convective heat, grease, and smoke generated from cooking? Is the kitchen environment suitable and comfortable, and what can be done if it’s not comfortable?”

“Hoods remove a large amount of air from the kitchen, and that must be replaced with air from the outside delivered back into the kitchen,” Morgan explains. “This equates to significant energy consumption, [requiring] fan energy for the exhaust [system] and makeup air for ventilation.”

Trends and Timing

Restaurants that put kitchens on display are all the rage, particularly as chefs gain celebrity status and diners become enamored with foodie shows that glamorize all things culinary. Whether or not a restaurant should have an open kitchen is hardly an open and shut argument.

“Not so fast,” is the advice from Brad Belletto, CEO of Vision 360 Design. The decision to showcase the kitchen in an open environment should depend largely on the food and how it’s being cooked.

“If you have food that doesn’t involve theater, in some ways there’s no point in having an open kitchen,” says Belletto. Also, the chef has to be inclined to performance and guest-interaction—certainly not one who requires privacy.

There are also pragmatic considerations: “When you have an open kitchen, you’re changing the environment as far as energy goes,” explains Belletto. “It’s more difficult to engineer HVAC for the space because you’re bringing the heat of the kitchen into the dining area. It’s a lot harder to do.”

“There’s a cosmetic piece to it, there’s the energy piece, and then there’s the end-result,” Belletto continues. “An operator has to decide if there is really a reason to have it out there. If a chef understands how to flambé and is very theater-driven, then it makes sense. If you’re just opening it up so people can see back into the kitchen, it doesn’t make sense.”

Ultimately it comes down to whether the open kitchen will enhance or detract from the dining experience. “Certain cuisines are messier to prep, and a lot of times you don’t necessarily want guests to see that,” cautions Belletto.

Whatever the incentives are for updating or renovating a kitchen, the biggest challenge will likely be timing. When restaurants undertake a kitchen makeover, more than likely the business will have to close for a time. The interruption to service is probably one of the main reasons most operators procrastinate.

“Every day a restaurant is closed revenue is lost,” says Mark Brenner, vice president of sales at Eagle Group. “The restaurant owner and equipment dealer should plan remodels early enough to keep shut-down to a minimum. Most operators don’t realize that equipment is not just sitting on the shelf.”

Planning ahead helps minimize the time it takes to complete a kitchen makeover, and thoroughly defining objectives and processes helps ensure the most successful outcome.

Hatco
page 61

Chicago Show and Tell

The 2014 NRA show will spotlight kitchen innovations with the very latest in performance, efficiency, and productivity. *By Christa Gala*

The numbers are impressive: Over four days, more than 1,800 suppliers and thousands of buyers will gather in Chicago for the 2014 NRA Show to take a peek at the industry's latest products in technology, operations, marketing, menu development, and more. Here is a preview of some of the kitchen innovations attendees can expect to learn about.

Induction Cooking

Attendees will likely see—and hear—a lot about this subject, which is gaining traction industry-wide. Brad Belletto, CEO of Vision 360 Design, describes induction cooking as a quick-heating process that precisely controls the cooking temperature, thanks to the way it generates heat in the pan.

“It’s changed the efficiency of cooking immensely—no fire, no heating elements generated from the stove,” Belletto says.

He adds that Vision 360 Design has been pushing induction cooking for the last seven or eight years, but its acceptance in the industry has really grown in the last two or three years—to where even aspiring chefs are cutting their teeth on the new technology.

“Commercial induction cooking is starting to be taught in some of the culinary schools,” he explains. “I’ve seen students coming out in the last couple of years who actually understand what it is. With induction, heating water takes just a few minutes; with a gas burner, it’s ten minutes. Less energy spent, less time, better use of labor.”



AT THE ANNUAL NRA CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO, RESTAURANT OWNERS, OPERATORS, AND CHEFS CAN LEARN ABOUT KITCHEN INNOVATIONS AND SEE NEW PRODUCTS IN ACTION.

Ventilation

Exhaust hood systems don’t need to run at full speed constantly. There are several times during the course of restaurant operations when they require less power—such as prep time, cool down, and clean-up at the end of the night.

One technology, called demand control ventilation and available with CaptiveAire’s Smart Controls, automatically adjusts fan speeds as needed based on the cooking operation, offering greater flexibility and easy adjustment. There are also local and remote communication capabilities to view, monitor, and troubleshoot issues.

“Integration, communication, and monitoring are the future of commer-

cial kitchen ventilation,” says Michael Morgan, sales development manager of CaptiveAire.

Power Fryers

Vulcan’s PowerFry5 Hi-Efficiency ENERGY STAR Qualified Fryer was awarded the NRA’s 2014 Kitchen Innovations award and will be displayed in the Kitchen Innovations booth.

“The PowerFry VK Series Fryer exemplifies our efforts to design equipment that seamlessly increases productivity, reduces energy costs, extends oil life, and delivers exceptional cooking results,” says Paul Forrest, a business unit manager with Vulcan, which manufactures fryers, griddles, and char-broilers.

Full Page
page 63

RESTAURANT SMARTS KITCHEN MAKEOVERS

Heat is normally exhausted from the fryer at temperatures of more than 1,000 degrees. These fryers harness the flue heat by using it in multiple passes before it leaves the fryer. Doing so reduces the flue temperatures, keeps the kitchen cooler, and doesn't overwork the hood systems, according to Forrester. Multiple passes also heat the oil more efficiently, requiring fewer BTUs than traditional fryers and saving on energy costs.

"Energy-efficient equipment wasn't really a must-have years ago," Forrester says. "The thought was, the more BTUs, the better. Today, with newer innovative designs, fewer BTUs can outperform older equipment due to the superior heat-transfer technologies now available."

Braising Pans

Unified Brands will showcase its Groen line of cookware, specifically its braising pans.

"Braising pans have always been touted as the most universal piece of equipment in a restaurant," says Art Delorenzo, vice president of marketing and product management at Unified Brands. "You can fry in it, braise in it, grill on it, and make stocks with it. The problem with them in the past was—because they had always been used for the institutional market—they were always larger than a traditional restaurant could really manage, particularly relative to space."

To that end, Unified Brands recently

introduced a smaller version of its braising pan with the same attributes of the larger one.

Smart Controllers

Broaster Company, celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, recently released a smart controller option for its fryers that eliminates menu screens, which makes it easier for employees to operate the equipment.

"It works like a smartphone: it's a touchscreen with images and pictures," says Rod Jones, marketing communications specialist. "It's an industry-leading product because the interaction between person and equipment takes less time and is more user-friendly for employees."

Matters of Taste (and Beyond)

The dining experience is impacted by all aspects of culinary practice.



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Back-of-the-house improvements may also require an understanding of what diners want to see, smell, and hear from a kitchen, says Brent White, design director of environments with Tesser, a brand strategy and design firm. The proper design or renovation in a kitchen will impact whether a diner finds the food alluring or unsatisfactory.

SIGHT Open kitchens offer intrigue to customers, who may want to watch as their dishes are prepared or witness the art and science of theatrical culinary techniques.

But on a more pragmatic side, White suggests that operators who design their restaurants with an open kitchen should think about what their chefs do in a kitchen that would make a diner hungry—especially because people "eat with their eyes and respond

well to visuals."

"Show the things you're doing that are appealing and different," White says. "Something you think is mediocre might actually be what people want to see." Even something as simple as grating cheese or decorating sweets in a conspicuous spot may prove entertaining and appetizing.

SMELL Since operators spend so much time in their restaurants, they may become immune to smells in their kitchens—good or bad—that affect the food and guests' perception of it. These smells can range from a heavily-scented chemical cleaner to a lingering odor in the freezer.

Operators should not be afraid to seek objective input about the aroma atmosphere, White says. "If [the restaurant] smells

like wet carpet, you're out [in diners' minds]," he explains. "If it smells like fantastic food, it makes guests hungry and they will want to stay and eat—and probably eat more."

SOUND There's a fine line between a restaurant that's festive and busy and one that's overwhelmed with noise. "If it's overly loud, that's off-putting," says White. "Operators need to think about the sounds that are coming from the kitchen, and work to reduce kitchen sounds that may have a negative impact on the restaurant's atmosphere."

An open-kitchen design, for example, requires that the kitchen staff reduce the rattling of pots and pans, keep the shouting of orders to a minimum, and maintain a professional decorum with dialogue and volume.

full page ad
page 65

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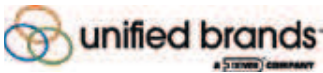
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