

A Recipe for Successful



Kitchen Planning

By: Jim Wixson, CFSP,
Cooking Products Manager – Georgia Power
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Sometime in your foodservice career, you may be involved in the planning process of designing or remodeling a commercial kitchen. This may happen as a result of serving on a committee, or maybe you will want to open a restaurant of your own and you need to get started with facility design. How will you start? Who should you call? Where do you go for help? Over the past several decades I have worked with hundreds of people who have had this daunting task and had no idea about where or how to get started. The learning curve from a dead start can seem overwhelming. No one wants to make the wrong decisions, or just blindly accept other's ideas about something as complex as a foodservice operation. Time and money are always important factors, and there is never enough of either. So, finding yourself tasked with this opportunity, what steps should you take, what issues are important to understand, and how do you ensure you are getting maximum value?

This task is hardly a do-it-yourself project. It is strongly recommended that you seek the help of a foodservice professional to assist you with the collection of the thousands of details and decision points needed to begin the design process. In addition to an Architect that will be working with you on the project, there are several excellent sources you can engage to help you with the kitchen decision-making process. They are Food Facilities Consultants, and Foodservice Dealer Sales Engineers.

Food Facilities Consultants: These professionals work on a fee basis and can shape an idea, nurturing it into a fully developed plan with specifications ready to be sent out to dealers or contractors to be priced. They will assist with menu development, and some develop the color board, materials, and finishes schedules. They also can review bids for accuracy, award a winning bidder, and ensure the buyer that the equipment specified is supplied in the final installation. Obviously, the more work the consultants do to develop the scope of the project, the more they need to charge. The benefit to you (the customer) is that these professionals make decisions rapidly and have years of experience to draw upon. As a general rule, the larger the facility, the greater the value of consultants.

Foodservice Dealer Sales Engineers: These professionals work for a restaurant equipment dealer and get paid when

you purchase the equipment from their firm. They will charge a retainer to compensate for their time, should you actually purchase your equipment from another dealer. These individuals can perform most of the same functions as Food Facilities Consultants with the exception of the bid process. There are several advantages to this type of relationship. Sales Engineers take a personal interest in all of their designs. They are keenly aware of new technologies and because there is generally a more conversational relationship, they are likely to recommend trying new ideas.

Other individuals that can help get the ball rolling with you or your committee are manufacturer's representatives, foodservice dealer sales personnel, and others who have been through the process before. These individuals will help guide you to a consultant or sales engineer, or they can get you in touch with someone from a church, school, or restaurant that has been through the process. Those with previous experience are almost always happy to share their experiences and knowledge, especially those things that they might do differently.

As mentioned previously there are literally thousands of decision points to be made on even the smallest project. Each of the project steps are outlined below:

- **Scope of Project:** Before you start with any drawings, the first step is to develop the scope of your project. This is the process where both you and the professional can define the type of facility, size, budget, and general ideas about the look and feel of the serving system or dining room. This involves making general decisions concerning the purpose, space constraints, capital budget, menu, operational hours, scratch cook or heat and serve, full or self service, and many more questions. It is important to fully scope your project without getting too involved with the fine details. This will properly set the parameters of the project and will allow for modifications and improvements as the learning improves.
- **Menu Development:** The customer needs to convey to the designer a detailed list of all the food they plan to serve. This is a critical step so that the kitchen designer can best determine the quantity and correct application of preparation and

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cooking equipment. Before creating a layout, the design professional needs to make a simple schedule of the various pieces of equipment they will need to include in the plan. This is an important step, because it helps the designer be certain they will not accidentally overlook a critical item in the plan. It is easy, for example, to overlook something as conspicuous as an ice machine. So, better to be safe than sorry.

- **Preliminary Layout:** Now it is time for the designer to begin blocking out a layout, giving special attention to process and flow. A deliberative plan provides that all of the necessary elements (areas) will work seamlessly together without causing interruptions in flow. The food product should move smoothly from refrigerated or dry storage to pre-prep area, cooking line, serving line, dining room, and then cleanup. This takes the skill of a trained professional who understands the impacts of health, fire, life-safety, National Sanitation Foundation, HVAC and other codes. It also takes the art of spatial design abilities, and the knowledge of what does and does not work from previous job experiences.
- **Preliminary Budget:** At this stage of the project, the designer will give the customer an approximate cost of all of the scheduled equipment on the job. Excluding plumbing, electrical and mechanical work, this is a rough number for equipment only that most closely matches the customer's quality requirements. Specifically, the designer's best guess assuming standard purchase items, limited custom fabrication, non-exotic equipment specifications, and past histories.
- **Equipment Detail and Specification:** After customer approval of the flow, process, and general acceptance of a working budget, it is now time to detail the actual cooking line. Productivity is the key to the success of any foodservice operation, making it one of the most critical elements of the project. Just like the Goldilocks story: "Not too many, not too few, but just the right amount" and type of equipment. The designer then creates equipment specifications that detail the exact equipment items required that will perform for the customer as intended. There may be specific brands of equipment you would like to be included in your specifications; however, the designer's job is to balance the capital budget constraints with the functionality of the customer needs. This is the point of the project where trade-offs or negotiations may need to be made. In the business this is called "value engineering." This involves possibly using economy equipment items, future purchase items, or standard manufacturer items in lieu of custom fabrication.

It is important to interject here that the equipment selection

process needs to be scrutinized from many different angles. There are many considerations about each piece of equipment, and how the entire cooking line works as a whole. You are now into an area of decision-making that may be really difficult. It is important for the customer to understand the capabilities and performance of the equipment that will be employed in the kitchen. The evaluative process of the equipment items recommended will require you to have a great deal of faith in the design professional, but it is recommended that for each piece of equipment selected, the following questions would be asked:

- How much product per hour will it cook?
 - What is the life cycle cost?
 - What is the purchase price?
 - How much does it cost to operate?
 - What is the impact in the quality of the food?
 - What is the impact on labor?
 - Does the equipment item cause work environment problems?
 - Is it easy to operate?
 - Can the equipment item serve more than one purpose?
- **Final Layout and Engineering:** This is the last step prior to sending the project out to bid. All of the negotiated changes from the preliminary layout are incorporated into a final drawing set. Then all plumbing, gas, and electrical rough-ins are developed. Ventilation issues are incorporated into the drawings, along with special details that will help convey the finished plan. The long and arduous process is almost over.
 - **Awarding the Project:** At this point, the project should be ready to send out for bid. If you have hired a consultant, they will help you determine which dealer should be awarded the project based on their bid price and historical project performance. If you worked and you feel comfortable with a sales engineer, and the prices come back within a small percentage difference, you might then order the equipment directly from them. The benefit of having the designer handle the sale is that they know all of the special details about your kitchen. It is important to understand that sometimes pricing is subject to interpretation, and someone that has not been working with you may not understand all of your requirements.

You can now see why this is not an easy task; however, if you engage professionals in your planning process you will be guided painlessly through the obstacle course of decision-making. Each missed opportunity or incorrect decision can stall or set a project back by many months. Consultants and Sales Engineers are money in the bank! They will steer you clear of profit pitfalls and build in efficiency. I hope that this article has been helpful in giving you a recipe to successful kitchen planning.