

Using smart design to drive kitchen productivity

Smart kitchen design is crucial to driving productivity and profitability in the casual dining sector, where equipment layout is so critical to operational success. By employing experienced chefs, Advance Group ensures it can contribute relevant industry expertise and professional insight to every aspect of cooking methodology and the design process.

Darryl Pannell, Commercial Director, commented: “Firstly we invest time in getting to understand what the customer is looking to achieve with their menu composition in terms of volume, time and menu specifics. These are the factors that determine the primary gearing of the kitchen. Consequently the ergonomics are absolutely vital – chefs shouldn’t be walking more than three feet while cooking the dish. With burgers, as a common example, there is a set process that involves the main product being taken out of the fridge and then the assembly of many other ancillary ingredients – efficiency of movement is therefore a real priority.”

Many catering equipment suppliers tend to base their designs on traditional models with pre-determined zones. They are also inclined to work off a tick-box list of pre-determined brands and products rather than focusing on end use processes. This contrasts with Advance’s bespoke approach which starts off by developing an in-depth understanding of the customer’s methods. Pannell said: “The key is creating an operating solution that works for every aspect of the menu. This means determining, dish by dish, what is the volume? Capability? Quality level? All of this needs to fit with the customer’s objectives.”

Pannell continued: “As a result of asking these questions and basing our designs on the responses, our kitchens are guaranteed to work from week one as we have tested the concept to destruction.” Much of Advance’s innovation is re-defining the way the industry is designing kitchens. The group’s own state of the art development kitchen at its Dunstable headquarters typifies the kind of innovation and investment that has enabled Advance to generate fast and sustainable growth.

Pannell said: “We have gone on a long journey with many emerging brands where we have added a lot of value to the process. We also have a tried and tested methodology for refurbishing and cleaning existing customer equipment, which can then be put into a new kitchen. Our test facilities have been used by many of the UK’s biggest casual dining brands. Driven by a passion for cooking, we work right through the production process with the customer to ensure there is a balance between creative solutions and functionality.”

A perfect example of this consultative approach with a major casual dining group entailed Advance carrying out an operational study on a grilled concept. The customer had already started to install a £5,000 chargrill that would cost £3,000 a year to run and £500 a year to maintain. Multiplied by hundreds of sites, this represented a huge investment decision for the company.

Advance established that the customer actually needed grills that cooked food more quickly, rather than greater capacity. Moreover, food wasn't being delivered on time due to specifying grills not up to the job - consequently the temperature recovery time was totally inadequate. Advance helped the customer save tens of thousands of pounds.

Another multi-site casual dining customer asked Advance to look at every aspect of its process, from menus to in-house challenges and delivery. The customer also required the development of a future-proofed kitchen operating platform that could respond to multiple needs.

Pannell added: "We sketched out how the kitchen would be laid out, asked questions about any volume constraints, and shaped our re-designs around high volume items. Our advice came from working in kitchens producing food in a more ergonomic way, which worked for the customer's exact menu. This was a good example of a customer seeking out our specific expertise and advice on how to adapt, evolve and develop dining brands – essentially reinvigorating what had previously been perceived as a slightly tired but major national brand."

For further information on the smart kitchens revolution visit www.smart-kitchens.co.uk