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From the Inside Out

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Valuable Assets

Today's facility managers should have a say in design decisions

In the past, most facilities professionals were not deeply involved with new store or remodel designs. The majority of the design elements, including equipment and finishes, were specified by the architects, construction and purchasing personnel. This sometimes led to the use of cheap equipment and materials that needed additional repair and maintenance dollars to maintain normal restaurant operations.

Nowadays, facilities is (or should be) inherently involved with their internal departments, specifying equipment and materials that will hold up under the harsh restaurant environments and are economically beneficial over the long term. Some items to consider for new store construction design are:

HOOD EXHAUST DUCTWORK

If possible, ensure the ductwork, from the hoods to the fans, is run vertically straight up to the roof. Eliminate or minimize turns and bends. This will save money in hood cleaning costs and allow more thorough ductwork cleaning, which reduces the risk of grease build-up.

Install access panels every 12 feet of vertical run. Ensure panels are sized accordingly and sealed with approved gaskets. Also, provide hinged curbs for all exhaust fans so they can be tilted for easy access and cleaning.

ENERGY MANAGEMENT

At a minimum, use programmable thermostats. These are inexpensive and can be programmed for proper temperature settings throughout the day and automatically adjusted at night.

If resources are available, investigate installing a complete energy management system, which can monitor and control all HVAC/R and lighting functions. The systems turn equipment and lighting on/ off at pre-programmed times. They offer a good return on investment and keep the facility comfortable for both the guests and employees without wasting energy. They also can send alarms via email or text message when temperatures go out of range, alerting personnel to follow up on an equipment issue before it becomes a huge problem.

LIGHTING

Installing LED lighting is one of the easiest ways to save energy and reduce periodic repair and maintenance costs. LED lights can now be used for pendants, cans, menu boards, wall packs, pole lights and any other general lighting needs. The costs have come down dramatically, and the payback for the initial higher cost is within a year.

LED lighting can now produce a wide range of light levels and color renditions. These lights should be used everywhere, both inside and outside of the facility.

EQUIPMENT

Buy Energy Star-rated equipment and, where possible, use gas rather than electric. Also, it's very important to check which local vendors can perform warranty and regular service. Some manufacturers have great equipment but fail to have qualified local service representatives. Most restaurants do not have back-up equipment and the need for service often is immediate.

SUSTAINABILITY

This initiative is here to stay, so embrace it and design its elements into new stores. This topic is far too large to cover in this article, but discuss various initiatives with the local trash haulers for recycling opportunities. To save water, specify low-flow fixtures in the restrooms, sinks, dishmachines and all other kitchen areas. Use recyclable or green products wherever possible in building materials.

LANDSCAPING

To save water and lower maintenance, check with local officials and landscaping companies on which plants, shrubs, trees and other greenery need minimal water and maintenance. Low-growth plants will look good and not require seasonal maintenance.

OTHER

For roofing, specify only a type in which grease will not void the warranty, as the majority of restaurants run the risk of grease accumulating on the roof. A white, single-ply product will work well as it will not be degraded by grease and will save energy by deflecting the sun.

For the back-of-the-house flooring, specify a product that can withstand heavy grease, chemicals and water saturation and is easy to repair or replace. There is no "magic" product. Tile, poured material and rubber make up the majority of the flooring options. Tile is relatively cheap but use only grease- and chemical-resistant epoxy grout. If you choose poured or rubber flooring, check with the supplier/installer on which local vendors will be handling warranty and/or repair services. In some cases, there may be an issue with finding a local service company, and if damage exists, it will need to be repaired quickly to ensure moisture does not seep into other undamaged areas.

In summary, facility professionals need to get involved with specifying equipment, materials and programs to protect company assets and prolong the life of the facility and its contents.

Feel free to contact me to share other areas where facilities input is needed in store design. Email me at jeff@rfmaonline.com or call me at (972) 805-0905, x-3.

Dover and out!

Jeff Dover's facilities career started in 1985. He has been employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bennigan's, TGI Friday's, Fuddrucker's and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as Energy Manager, Facilities Manager and Director of Facilities at the various brands.