

Rolling Out The Welcome Mat

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Maintaining curb appeal through effective pavement upkeep

It surrounds your building, your customers use it every day and it's either keeping your site from being damaged, or it's creating hazards that put people at risk. It's your pavement, and it's important that it's properly maintained.

Asphalt and concrete pavement is one of the most overlooked aspects of a business. Unlike other industries, which are moving away from brick and mortar in favor of off site delivery, restaurants will always have customers who require a place to park and who walk from their vehicle into your facility. This means your customers' first experience doesn't begin when they enter the door of the building, but when they enter your parking lot.

Are you taking proper care of the property's welcome mat? Consistent maintenance for all aspects of the lot is the only way to ensure longevity and safety for owners and customers alike.

Dealing with Cracks

Asphalt cracks are pavement's most lethal problem. As water enters the cracks, it compromises the sub-base, leading to pavement failure and potholes. In regions where the weather dips below freezing, this is made worse by the freeze-thaw cycle, as cracks grow constantly throughout the winter. Crack sealing is, dollar for dollar, the best maintenance investment a property owner can make to extend the life of the pavement. This annual practice is required for proper parking lot maintenance.

Slowing the Degradation Process

Asphalt pavement is made up of a mixture of aggregates, fines and oils. As it ages, the oils dry out and the fines begin to wash away. Eventually, the larger aggregates polish and lose all integrity. Each step in this deterioration will exacerbate other lot issues, diminishing the time between more extensive—and expensive—repairs.

You can delay this destructive degradation with sealcoating. This important step, as the name suggests, seals the lot and reintroduces both fines and oils, extending the life of the asphalt. Sealcoating also has the added benefit of bringing the asphalt back to its black sheen, which improves curb appeal. Sealcoating should be done at least every three years for it to have any maintenance value, rather than it simply being cosmetic.

Eliminating Hazards

Even with consistent crack sealing and seal coating, potholes and alligator cracking are inevitable in any asphalt lot. The causes of potholes are numerous and drastically vary from site to site. Potential culprits include a bad base or sub-base, washout, oil biting and, of course, wear from weather and driving.

Infrared patching is a quick and cost-effective way to both remove hazards like these and slow, if not outright stop, further corrosion. An infrared patch consists of heating the area of concern, then removing the top 1.5 to 2 inches, or facelift, of the asphalt and replacing it with new asphalt. This process also binds the new asphalt to the surrounding older aggregate with a watertight seal. The work can be completed after business hours, limiting the effect on traffic to your property. Infrared patching should be performed as needed. If it is done early enough, it can greatly delay the need for larger repairs.

Concrete Removal and Replacement

Concrete eventually cracks, and this cannot be avoided. The ground under the concrete is constantly shifting, especially in cold weather climates, causing fractures. When this happens overtime, the concrete will begin to separate, causing unevenness and trip hazards.

The best long-term repair is to remove and replace the areas of concern. It's best to complete concrete removal and replacement as soon as you notice an issue. This will ensure the surrounding concrete and asphalt aren't undermined and limit customer hazards.

ADA Considerations

As the U.S. population continues to age, the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) is at the forefront of legal concerns for restaurant management.

Various agencies and laws, from the federal level all the way to the city level, have an impact on whether your site is up to ADA standard, and they are becoming more active in making sure that companies are meeting the law. And while no one would actively limit accessibility to their business, the specifics of what is compliant and what isn't can be confusing. The best option is to have your site assessed—but make sure it is completed by someone who will consider the costs and impact on your business and will be an advocate for you should someone try to take you to court. ADA compliance can be easily overlooked, but doing so can be costly.

Staying Vigilant

Remember, pavement requires constant maintenance. It's important to find a qualified pavement consultant/contractor who understands your budget and is dedicated to giving you the best possible service in order to extend the life of your parking lot. Without a long-term pavement plan in place, you'll be forced to take a reactive approach. In this situation, you are not only losing the full potential of your initial pavement purchase, you are also throwing money away on repairs that are just getting you by.

A proper maintenance plan can save you at least five years or as long as 20 or more years between complete reconstruction. When repairing your pavement, consider ways to limit customer inconvenience as they access your facility.

The prices and availability of services will be entirely dependent on your area and what vendor you choose. Their standard of work, willingness to operate on your timetable and level of professionalism are the greatest variables.

In conclusion, the first customer interaction with your business is the parking lot. When people drive up to your place of business, are they walking across an obstacle course made of trip hazards, exposed aggregate and water or ice-filled potholes? Or are they easily crossing the parking lot? If you are properly maintaining the lot, you can be confident they are experiencing the latter.

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