

## From The Inside Out

*Jeff Dover*

### The Power of Planning Ahead

How many times have you received an urgent call or email from one of your stores soon after a regional or area director visited the restaurant and discovered several minor items needing immediate repair? Or, maybe you received the same message just prior to the head of operations coming to the store.

We have all experienced this. Usually, the issues are relatively minor, such as cracked floor tiles, leaking plumbing fixtures or failed light bulbs. In some cases, restaurants take care of these minor repairs themselves, but most simply wait until numerous minor issues accumulate before calling service providers to make the necessary repairs.

### Getting Proactive

Wouldn't it be nice to have these issues taken care of on a regular basis without too much involvement on your part? There is a way to achieve this. Just like the preventive maintenance programs for HVAC, greasetrapping and hood cleaning, you can institute a "handyman" program whereby a service provider periodically sends a qualified technician to make small repairs throughout the restaurant.

Granted, this isn't free, but you will pay more if you call different vendors multiple times to make these repairs. Keeping your store (and brand) looking good at all times is in the best interest for everyone. Customers notice little things, such as leaking faucets, small holes in the wall, broken floor tiles, torn carpeting and peeling paint.

Consider hiring a technician for some of these common problem areas: doors and hardware, floor tile and grouting, carpeting, minor plumbing, painting, lighting, electrical, glass, carpentry, walls and ceilings, exterior building, fencing and concrete patching.

### Creating the Program

First, you must get buy-in from internal departments, such as finance and operations. A periodic handyman program that is designed and operating properly should reduce overall reactive maintenance spending for the company. You will need detailed current and past R&M spending data to conduct a payback analysis. The goal is to save maintenance dollars and keep the stores in great condition.

The next step is to partner with a company that has the resources available to meet your needs. Partnering with a vendor that already is performing preventive maintenance or other periodic duties in your stores may be a cheaper alternative

than introducing a new player into the mix. Due diligence will be required in vetting companies to find the right match that meets all your qualifications.

## Prioritizing Projects

Next, create a store checklist of potential maintenance items that need to be completed or reviewed by local store operations personnel or the service technician. The list is one of the most important items in the entire program as it establishes what projects need to be addressed and their priority. Operations should own the list.

Store operation representatives and the facility manager should walk the entire restaurant with the technician. The goal is to note any items that need attention and prioritize them accordingly. This list becomes the master document that is updated and communicated to all parties on a regular basis.

The updated list should be provided to the technician prior to the scheduled visit to ensure he or she has all the materials needed to make repairs. It is inefficient for the technician to review the list onsite and then drive to a supply house for necessary materials. Another way to save money is to have store personnel pick up the materials, eliminating a potential parts mark-up from the technician. If the restaurant has space, some materials could even be stored onsite, such as paint, lightbulbs, and floor or ceiling tiles. After several service visits, it will become easier to determine what the store provides versus what the technician can bring.

## Setting a Schedule

The next item is the timing and frequency of the visits. Depending on the condition and budget of each location, an eight-hour visit or two four-hour visits every month or quarter is a good starting point. Each store may require different times and frequencies. Start off slow, and add more visits if needed. You will likely adjust the visit parameters over time.

Communication between the stores, technicians and corporate is vital to constantly review the list, costs and conditions of the store. Since most stores are closed in the mornings, consider having two four-hour visits in the morning hours prior to store opening rather than one full-day visit.

## Review and Reassess

The last item to complete is the review process. What went right? What didn't? What changes need to be addressed and made? This is a critical piece as the review process determines next steps and the program's overall success. R&M spending may increase in the short term due to the added charge for the program, and a more intense view of a facility's needs may cause a temporary spike in spending. However, over the long term, costs should go down and the facility will look better.

The biggest buy-in is with the store's operations team as they are responsible for updating the list, distributing it to the technician and monitoring the work performed. Obviously, the technician must be capable in many trades. As the technician becomes more familiar with the restaurants, his or her efficiency will increase. The technician should also train store personnel on easy Axes to save additional dollars.

In the restaurant facility business, not every local handyman is properly trained and insured. Work with RFMA vendors to ensure you are covered in both of these areas.

Any comments are appreciated. Feel free to contact me at (972) 805-0905, ext. 3, or email at [jeff@rfmaonline.com](mailto:jeff@rfmaonline.com) .

Dover and out.

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