BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE FOR THE CATERING EQUIPMENT INDUSTRY

Catering INSIGHT

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UP TO THE TASK

High quality food prep solutions for busy kitchens

FLYING HIGH

NWCE discusses growth strategy and expansion plans

SHARED VISION

Bartlett begins new chapter under employee-ownership

KITCHEN OPTIMISATION

Exploring the trends and technologies that enable dealers to get the most out of any kitchen space

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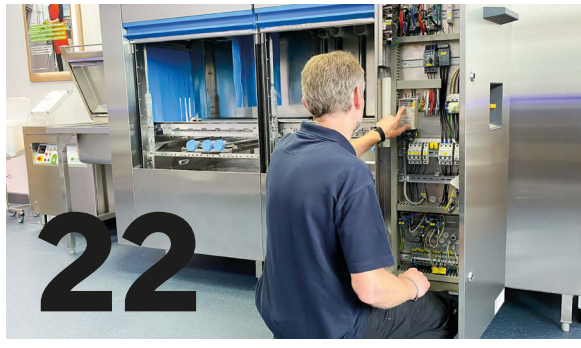



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THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS WHERE DEALERS ARE CONCERNED

A hugely fulfilling part of this job is the opportunity to get out and about in the industry and experience first-hand the excellent work that takes place within supplier and distributor businesses up and down the country. Among the places I visited most recently was Goldthorpe in South Yorkshire, home of True Refrigeration. The heavy duty refrigeration manufacturer has had its roots in this part of the country for years, but the launch of a new showroom was a more than justifiable reason for it to invite dealers for a behind-the-scenes tour of everything the facility has to offer.

Those in attendance got to learn about its extensive local warehousing, testing and product development capabilities as well as talk to members of True's UK team about all aspects of the business. Such occasions always provide a valuable insight to the immediate priorities and pain points of dealers – and by that I mean what's really important to them when it comes to the way that suppliers conduct business.

It is easy for outsiders to fall into the trap of thinking that dealers only care about pricing and margins. While we shouldn't underplay the significance of those two things - the commercials have to work in any relationship, after all – the reality is that it is actually the small details that often matter most when it comes to making partnerships work. It's things like clarity of communication, speed of response and availability of information that count, especially when individuals are working on projects where time is precious and end-customers want instant answers.

Dealers on the True tour spent time seeing products they didn't necessarily know it offered and were enthused when visualising how certain items or configurations could solve issues they have previously faced when designing kitchens. Matters that might sound insignificant, such as where warranty stickers are located on a piece of equipment and the merits of sharing customer service history online, were discussed at length. Questions relating to shipping, availability and even why castors aren't automatically fitted to the bottom of fridges came up during the conversation - simply because those are the things that matter personally to the people who asked them and the way they go about their jobs. Suppliers able to take care of the small details should hopefully find it creates enough goodwill that any bigger issues which arise will then take care of themselves.

A new look...

If you hadn't already noticed, *Catering Insight* has undergone a bit of a makeover. Over the last few months our design team has been hard at work creating new templates and giving the magazine a refresh. We hope you find the new lay-outs easier on the eye and agree that it is much cleaner and simpler to navigate. Don't forget that every print issue is also available on the website as a digital edition for those that like to access it via their mobile or desktop, too.

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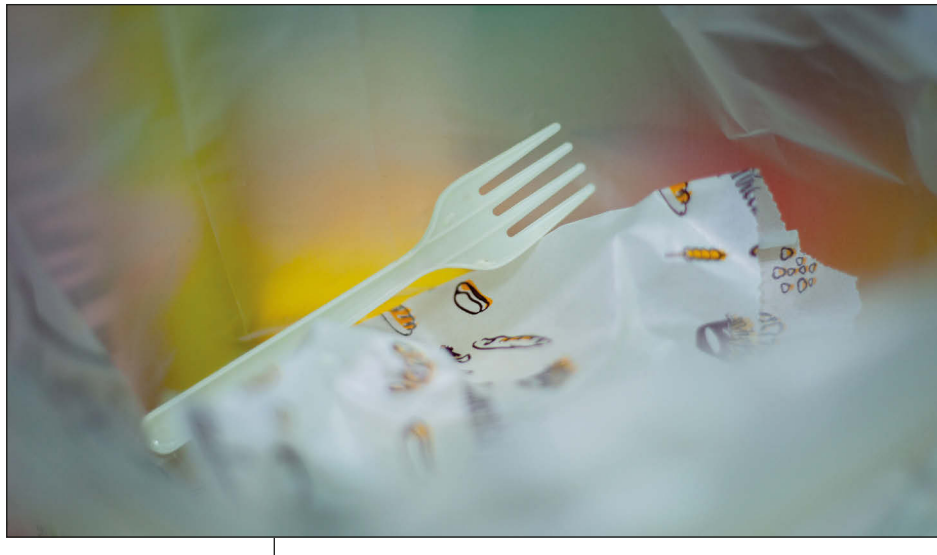
LACK OF CUTLERY WON'T CUT IT FOR CONSUMERS DESPITE INCOMING BAN

Light equipment dealers worried that customers will buy less cutlery when new single-use plastic rules come into force have nothing to fear – consumer expectations mean they will just buy more sustainable alternatives.



Over half of consumers still expect food-to-go outlets to provide cutlery despite the impending ban on single-use plastics.

A survey by Sapio Research, conducted on behalf of Celebration Packaging, found that consumers feel strongly about operators offering cutlery even though plastic items will be outlawed in England and Wales from October 2023.

Its poll showed that 53% of consumers still expect a food outlet or takeaway to supply cutlery, while 46% said they were happy to carry their own cutlery for consuming food-on-the-go.

In place of single use plastic cutlery, more than half of consumers would prefer reusable bamboo (54%) or metal cutlery (53%).

"The fact that more than 50% of people expect cutlery to be provided suggests that there is going to be an ongoing demand for single-use cutlery in some form," said Nick Burton, managing director of Celebration Packaging. "So, with the ban on single-use plastic, we need to offer the best recyclable or compostable alternatives, or be able to supply viable reusable options."

When asked how many times they would expect to be able to reuse a reusable item, such as cutlery, half (50%) of respondents said they expected reusable items to be able to be used up to 10 times, while over one fifth (23%) expected to be able to reuse an item more than 50 times.

"While people might expect a reuse rate of between x10 to x50, there is currently no agreed definition as to how many times cutlery - or packaging of any type - must be used to justify calling it reusable," continued Burton. "It is important to deliver on consumer expectations on reusables, and ensure they have the longest possible life."

"The survey shows that 53% of consumers expect a food-to-go outlet to provide cutlery, while 51% of consumers never, or rarely use, reusable cutlery for eating on the go. It is therefore clear that takeaways are still going to have a requirement for single-use cutlery of some kind, despite the bans."



- England uses 2.7 billion items of single-use cutlery per year
- More than 721 million single-use plates are used per year
- Only 10% of plastic plates and cutlery are recycled.
- If 2.7 billion pieces of cutlery were lined up they would go round the world over eight and a half times
- Plastic cutlery was in the top 15 most littered items in the country in 2020.

UPDATE

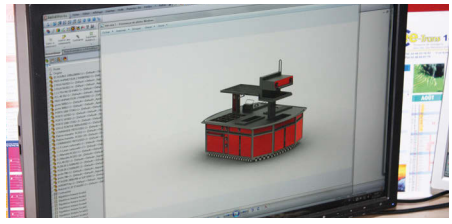
CATERING EQUIPMENT INDUSTRY NEWS ROUND-UP

SMARTER EQUIPMENT HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR KITCHEN DESIGN

The new generation of smart catering equipment is reshaping the job spec of kitchen designers by demanding a deeper technological understanding from the role than has traditionally been the case, according to distributors.

Kitchen designers need to be even more plugged in to the technical capabilities of the latest equipment available – and crucially the key differences between competing systems and platforms – in order to be able to spec the most suitable solutions for their clients.

"There's a big push at the moment - and I'm sure everybody else is the same - to get our design team on board with technology



because things are moving pretty quickly!" said Alex Bradley, director at RDA. "Gone are the days where you could just put in a bank of six burners and the job's done. We're looking at smarter technology, smarter equipment. We bring a lot of interior designers from university into the business and that works well for us because they don't have any bad habits in the trade. They should be approaching it from the operators' perspective and what it is that's really important to them, so that's the way that we're training our catering designers within the team now."

Mo Romanowicz, managing director at NCE, says that designers are key to how quickly smart equipment is adopted.

"It has certainly changed the way we design kitchens," he agreed. "I've always said that if you want to change anything in our industry, you've got to target two sides of the game: the chefs and operators on the ground; and the designers and consultants that spec the kitchens. If you manage to get the idea through to those two groups, you are able to create change. It is a journey."



ADVANCE GROUP SPREADS ITS WINGS WITH PHOENIX ACQUISITION



Advance Group has strengthened its regional service and maintenance capabilities by acquiring Phoenix Commercial Equipment.

Phoenix is based in Coleshill, Warwickshire and has been operating for 14 years. It specialises in supplying, installing and maintaining catering equipment, refrigeration and air conditioning.

Advance Group managing director, Ryan Yeates, said the takeover gives the company additional catering equipment service expertise and, crucially, expands its presence in the Midlands.

"The two businesses have been working with each other for several years," he explained. "During that time we have been working closely with Carolyne, [Meadows], Wayne [Meadows] and the wider team, and it's clear they share our values and passion.

"Phoenix is a really well-respected service and maintenance business and this acquisition gives Advance an opportunity to enhance its Midlands-based presence."

Yeates said the plan is to give Phoenix the autonomy and support to grow its business further under the Advance umbrella.

"Phoenix will continue to operate as a standalone business focusing on delivering excellent customer experience to its long-standing customers. Advance will provide additional support where required for Phoenix to grow over the next few years."

Advance Group is one of the largest catering equipment distributors in the UK, posting sales of almost £14m for the last financial year in which accounts are available.

SHINE CATERING SYSTEMS RECONFIGURES VENTILATION SERVICE

Shine Catering Systems has updated its DW/172-compliant ventilation service with enhanced system design and fabrication to provide additional benefits for contractors and chefs.

The introduction of a more modular system allows greater flexibility in design, meaning Shine can get more filters within the filter banks to support compliance with DW/172, which sets the benchmark for safe and effective ventilation in commercial kitchens.

The new feature-rich design capabilities also allow for the inclusion of cooling spots, induction cooling and entrainment



jets where necessary in ventilation canopies, as well as emergency lighting and access hatches for maintenance, which had not been possible with the previous fixed, non-modular designs.

Shine's systems continue to be fabricated from grade 304 stainless steel in compliance with DW/172, as opposed to grade 430 stainless steel which doesn't meet requirements of the standard.

They also use the highest quality of fabricated grease separators, with or without spark arrest as required, to provide a sufficient fire barrier.

Managing director, Julian Shine, said: "We've listened to feedback from the market and we're designing enhanced ventilation systems that take into account the comfort of the chef, the maintenance of the system, energy use and consumables consumption, whilst still complying with planning and kitchen legislation."

PFR RELEASES FIRST CROSS-BRAND DIGITAL BROCHURE FOR DEALERS

Pro Foodservice Reps (PFR) has launched its first cross-brand digital brochure, giving distributors enhanced visibility of UK-stocked products across its eight partner brands.

The 'On Demand' brochure showcases PFR's exclusive UK offering from American Metalcraft, Barfly, Baselite, Escali, Hatco, Mercer Culinary, Puracycle and Spidocook.

PFR was founded in 2014 by joint owners and directors, Andy Piggin and Ross Gibson, who took inspiration from the rep model common in North America.

It gives overseas manufacturers access to the UK market via an existing team of industry experts, while selling only via distributors and keeping product costs to the end-user competitive.

Andy Piggin, managing director of PFR, said: "Until now we've worked from separate brochures for each of our brands but this is a step change to help improve visibility for dealers. For the first time, we're displaying UK stock of all equipment across all brands, so dealers can simply pick what they need and get the product,



quickly. We remain focused on sourcing the products that customers want, at competitive prices, with minimum fuss – and this new catalogue will help facilitate that."

ALLIANCE TIGHTENS GRIP ON LIGHT EQUIPMENT CUP



Alliance secured the annual Light Equipment and Tableware (LET) Group Cup at this year's FEA forum – the sixth year in a row that the company has returned home with the main prize. The award recognises the distributor that has done the most to support the promotion of light equipment and tableware during the past year.

Lockhart Catering Equipment and United UK were also shortlisted for the award, but ultimately Alliance got its hands on the silverware after what FEA Light Equipment Group chair, Steve Goodliff, described as an "incredible" performance. "No company has ever won the Cup six times in a row. It's a huge achievement."

Sarah Overton, general manager of Alliance West Midlands, accepted the award for the company at the event, which took place at Whittlebury Hall in Northamptonshire. She said: "This is a proud moment for the business. It's a privilege to accept the award on behalf of the whole of Alliance." Crewe-based Alliance is an employee-owned business and turned over £140m last year.

NEW SALES CHIEF AT WELBILT



Welbilt has confirmed the appointment of Jonathan Butler as its new sales director for the UK and Ireland. His arrival follows the departure of Steve Hemsil, who left the business after 18 years and was a key part of the team that grew the company's sales to £130m.

The change in structure comes as Welbilt begins to align more closely with Ali Group, including taking on the UK distribution of brands already in its new owner's portfolio, such as Olis. Butler brings with him over 10 years' experience in the industry, most recently as regional sales director for Bunzl Lockhart where he oversaw a significant period of growth post-Covid. He also held positions at Nisbets, Parsley in Thyme and Heritage Silverware, as well as running his own sales agency.

Pere Taberner, sales VP for West Europe and Africa, commented: "Jonathan will bring a breadth of experience to Welbilt having managed both sales teams and key accounts at top sales and distribution organisations such as Lockhart and Nisbets. Jonathan has significant knowledge of developing customer needs in multiproduct organisations and this, along with his passion and understanding of both the equipment and foodservice industry, will make him a true asset to Welbilt."



BARTLETT BEGINS NEW CHAPTER UNDER OWNERSHIP OF EMPLOYEES



Staff at Devon-based catering distributor Bartlett are set to enjoy a share of future profits following its transition to an employee ownership trust.

One of the largest independent commercial catering equipment dealers in the UK has transitioned to employee ownership. KF Bartlett Ltd - which trades as Bartlett - has been sold to an employee ownership trust (EOT), meaning all staff will enjoy a share of future profits.

The move follows a comprehensive options review carried out by second-generation owner-managers David, Paul and Nicki Bartlett and their fellow shareholders as they looked ahead to retirement. They wished to preserve the legacy of the family business while rewarding loyal staff.

Bartlett was established in Exeter in 1958 by founder Ken Bartlett to cater for the growing demand for commercial refrigeration equipment. The company was incorporated a year later and opened its first showroom in 1960.

Today the family business employs 73 people, including more than 40 engineers, and made sales of almost £10m last year. As well as Exeter, it has offices in Redruth and South Brent, supplying and installing kitchen, refrigeration and air conditioning equipment to customers in the South West and beyond.

Director David Bartlett explained: "With a number of our senior directors looking to retire, considerable thought was given to succession and future planning, where it was felt important that the legacy and company values should continue.

"We were fortunate to have already in place a long-serving, highly experienced management team who are steeped in the culture of the company.

"After exploring a number of options, it became apparent that employee ownership had many benefits. The company has moved towards an inclusive structure which will give employees a real sense of ownership and provide more opportunities to reward everyone for the part they play in our future success."

Managing director, John Ponsford, said that transferring to an EOT made perfect sense from both an employee and customer point of view.

"For everybody it is business as usual - we have no third party company taking us over and changing the philosophy or ways in which we work - and employees also have a far greater say in the future of the business.

"Therefore moving forwards it enables us to uphold the values of the company that have enabled us to be so successful for the last 65 years.

"Becoming an EOT also allows us an advantage to our competitors when attracting new talent, particularly with the enhanced profit share now available, and we are looking forward to exciting times ahead," he adds.

Since current legislation came into force in 2014, EOTs have gradually become a popular option for owner-managed businesses when it comes to succession planning.

While the rules can be complex to navigate without expert guidance, there are tax reliefs for shareholders to encourage employee-ownership, and employees can receive tax-free bonuses of up to £3,600 a year.

FELLOW DEALER: 'YOU WON'T REGRET IT'

Croydon catering equipment distributor IFSE was sold to an employee ownership trust last year in a move that saw around 35 staff gain a significant and meaningful stake in the business. As well as being set up for the benefit of all employees, the company believes the transition to the new structure will make it an exciting proposition when it comes to attracting new talent, allowing it stand out from competitors. Group managing director, Andrew Fordyce, believes that fellow dealer Bartlett won't look back. "We completed our transition to an EOT in April 2022 and just over a year later it has been nothing but positive," he commented. "I really hope [theirs] goes as well for them and their employees."

"FOR EVERYBODY IT IS BUSINESS AS USUAL - WE HAVE NO THIRD PARTY COMPANY TAKING US OVER AND CHANGING THE PHILOSOPHY OR WAYS IN WHICH WE WORK"

ENERGY OPTIMISATION: WHAT'S ITS ROLE IN KITCHENS?

As more commercial kitchens turn to electric appliances to support their net zero strategies and reduce running costs in the face of rising utility bills, it is not always a simple switch in power. Richard Fordham of Ki-Tech Solutions explores the potential of energy optimisation in a rapidly-changing market.

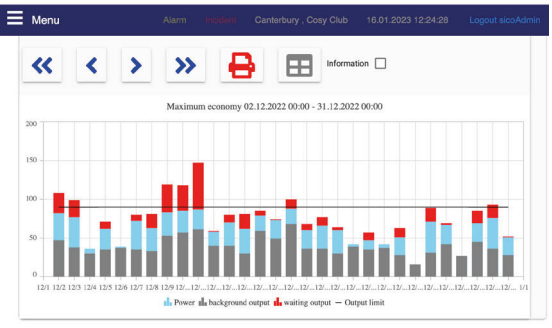
The electrification of commercial kitchens has been under way for many years, but with rapid advancements in technology and an increased focus on net zero emissions, the transition from gas to electric is gaining pace.

Commercial kitchens are notoriously large users of energy and fossil fuels. The UK catering industry is estimated to use more than 21,600 million kWh of energy per year – more than double the consumption per square metre than any other commercial activity or location – and a large percentage of this goes to waste due to inefficient equipment and usage.

Aside from the environmental benefits, electric appliances such as induction cooking tops offer greater control, quicker start-up times and lower running costs. Electric is rapidly becoming the fuel of choice in new and refurbishment projects.

Overcoming power challenges

In many cases, however, the decision to switch to electric comes down to more than preference. A frequent issue for many operators, designers and M&E consultants is a lack of available electrical power in the kitchen or overall building complex.



"IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNISE THAT ENERGY OPTIMISATION WILL NOT DIRECTLY LOWER ENERGY COSTS BY REDUCING ENERGY CONSUMPTION"

If no alternative power supply is available, the kitchen design may be compromised, leading to changes which are not ideal for the operator. Alternatively, the designer may look to upgrade the electrical supply, which is often very expensive (typically up to 35% of the overall kitchen fit-out cost) and brings uncertainty over project timescales.



Energy optimisation provides the solution, by redistributing available power to where it is needed – and only where it is needed.

How it works

Originally developed to limit total load and combat the peak power charges that remain common in Europe, the Sicotronic system from Ki-Tech overcomes the issue of insufficient electrical supply in UK kitchens.

It is important to recognise that energy optimisation will not directly lower energy costs by reducing energy consumption. Instead, it sets a threshold of power limitations and enables the kitchen to operate well below the established load calculations. The software redistributes energy from connected appliances, ensuring that the threshold (effectively the limit of the available supply) is never exceeded without disturbing normal kitchen operations.

Foodservice operators will see no discernible drop in performance as the power is cut to elements only for a matter of seconds, but it is enough to redistribute the load and maintain within the threshold.

Achieving kitchen potential

Our solution can reduce the required incoming power supply by 15% to 60%. In many cases, this can prevent the need for costly electrical power upgrades.

And the potential goes beyond the kitchen, too. Although the system was developed primarily for kitchens, Sicotronic can be used to optimise laundries, air conditioning, wellness and spa facilities and even car charging stations – providing a whole building solution in many hospitality sectors.

Richard Fordham is director of Ki-Tech Solutions, the UK's leading provider for data connectivity, monitoring and energy optimisation solutions. www.wearekitech.co.uk

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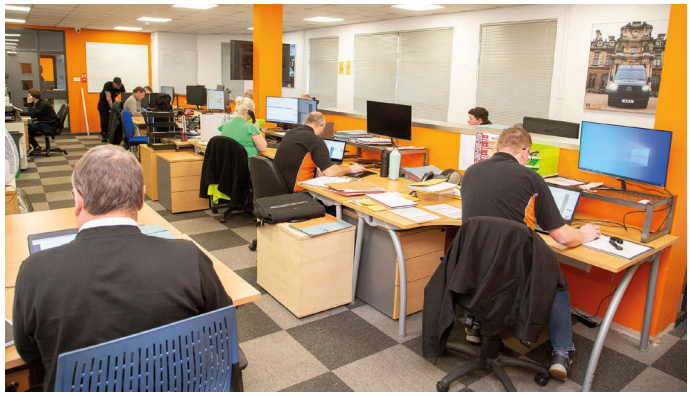
NWCE TAKES SERVICE AND SUPPORT TO NEW HEIGHTS

After achieving significant national growth and increasing its workforce to more than 70 staff, NWCE Foodservice Equipment is now targeting sales in excess of £10m. Managing director, Ben Odling, discusses the values underpinning its success and the investments it is making to ensure customers receive industry-leading support.





How would you best describe NWCE's activities today? Is it fair to say you are predominantly a service and maintenance business?

NWCE's activities are currently evenly split between maintenance, reactive repairs, projects and design, and sales of single appliance replacements. The business offers a comprehensive range of services to the foodservice sector, from independent businesses to regional and national chains. The strategy moving forward is to develop regional and national chain customer bases, with a focus on design and projects. The company also seeks to diversify its services and customer base by focusing on growth in the public sector and supporting facilities management companies.

The pandemic was a difficult time for the entire industry - what lessons did you learn from that period?

Reflecting on the pandemic period, NWCE took a strategic approach by seizing opportunities and investing in resources and infrastructure, which resulted in not needing a recovery plan. As a result, NWCE's sales growth performance increased by 100% in year one, 100% in year two, and is forecasted to exceed £10m in year three. Additionally, NWCE diversified its business model by opening a design and projects department in year one, thereby spreading sales revenue and stability across two departments (service and equipment sales). Furthermore, NWCE targeted other sectors, such as critical infrastructure, education, and the NHS, to make the business less dependent on the private sector. The lesson learned from this period is to diversify the business and not rely solely on one sector.

You are based in Bolton – how much of your business comes from the north-west and how much from elsewhere? How difficult is it to achieve national scale, especially in service?

Prior to the pandemic, around 70% of NWCE's service-related business came from the north, but since then the business has grown its service offering nationally. Although volumes of work have increased in the north, they now account for around 50% of the workflow volumes, with the remaining 50% coming from the south. NWCE's rebranding to NWCE Foodservice Equipment has also helped in our national growth strategy and services offered. Achieving national scale hasn't been as difficult as expected, as we have been allocated southern regions on merit when dealing with national accounts. This natural progression is a testament to the high standard of work carried out by us.

What kind of customers does NWCE work with? Have you historically focused on certain sectors – and is that likely to continue moving forward or are you seeking to enter new categories?

NWCE has primarily worked with customers in the hospitality sector, ranging from independent businesses to regional and national chains. Moving forward, NWCE's strategy is to expand its customer base in the regional and national chain segments, as well as focus on developing its design and projects

offering. Additionally, NWCE aims to diversify its service and reactive repairs customer base by focusing on the public sector and supporting facilities management companies. This will enable NWCE to expand its reach and offer its services to a broader range of customers.

What is your approach to catering equipment and refrigeration suppliers? Do you look to work with select brands?

At NWCE, the strategy is to avoid putting all eggs in one basket when it comes to catering equipment and refrigeration suppliers. However, if a client specifies a manufacturer that is suitable for their business, NWCE will work with it. If not, NWCE will advise the client on what is best for their requirements, backed up by evidence and data. NWCE has a framework for selecting preferred manufacturers based on factors such as product quality, sustainability, warranty support response, and stock availability for appliances and spare parts. We have strong partnerships with our manufacturing partners, who have been supportive and responsive, especially during the pandemic-related supply chain issues. Some manufacturers have been proactive in finding solutions instead of obstacles.

NWCE has made a series of strategic appointments across the business in recent years. How significant are those in terms of your long-term goals for growth?



"WE PLACE A STRONG EMPHASIS ON INVESTING IN INTERNAL TALENT AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, RECOGNISING THAT A SKILLED AND COMMITTED TEAM IS CRUCIAL FOR SUCCESS"

The company places a strong emphasis on investing in internal talent and personal development, recognising that a skilled and committed team is crucial for success. These key appointments have enriched the workforce with diverse skill sets and introduced new ideas and strategies to future-proof the business at all levels, from directors to apprentices. Internal promotions include John Dyer as the engineering team manager, bringing 30 years of experience, Dawn Edmundson as the service manager with 25 years of service and repairs-related business experience, and Phil Elliot as the procurement manager with 15 years of buying and supplier engagement expertise. In addition to these internal promotions, NWCE has also made strategic director-level appointments to further strengthen its leadership team. Nick Brassett, with 35 years of equipment specifications and kitchen design experience, now serves as the commercial director. Lyndon Moorby, with 35 years of know-how in kitchen design and project management, has been appointed as the projects director. Lastly, Lisa Odling, with 10 years of operational excellence experience, now serves as the ops director. NWCE's commitment to investing in its workforce also includes apprenticeships through the CEDA apprentice schemes, with plans to invest in more apprentices in the coming year. This strategic focus on talent development has contributed to a threefold growth in the workforce over the past three years, with over 70 team members now supporting NWCE's long-term strategic goal of further growth and consolidation in the market place. These key appointments have been instrumental in shaping NWCE's trajectory and ensuring its continued success in the future.

How do you view the competitiveness of the market landscape at the moment?

IMPROVING AND INNOVATING

Ben Odling, managing director of NWCE Foodservice Equipment, says the company has always focused on providing a high-quality service to its customers, going above and beyond their expectations. This includes investing in the latest technology and training staff to be the best they can be. "We also constantly strive to improve and innovate, whether that's through developing new services or finding more sustainable and eco-friendly solutions," he explains. "Overall, it's a combination of hard work, dedication, and a passion for what we do that has led to our success and recognition in the industry." NWCE has won two CateringInsight.com awards over the past three years, which Odling insists is testimony to the strength and endeavour of the team. "It adds an extra layer of significance when our industry peers, customers, and suppliers vote on it, making it even more special," he says.



In terms of market landscape, NWCE sees it as a highly competitive one, with costs always being a factor in customer decisions. However, being a company run by engineers and backed up by excellent administrative staff gives NWCE an edge, as we can provide the correct advice to clients, gaining their trust and helping them save unnecessary spend in areas like maintenance, energy, and capital spend. NWCE's technical ability also allows us to specify the correct equipment for clients, resulting in significant savings for some of them, such as over £30,000 per year in energy costs for one kitchen alone for a national client. We also offer bespoke maintenance packages after visiting sites, surveying and collating data on equipment usage, avoiding unnecessary spend on maintenance that is not required and preventing reactive call outs and equipment downtime for equipment with heavy usage. Overall, NWCE believes that having their clients' best interests at heart and proving it through their services helps them retain business, leading to growth despite the challenges posed by the market landscape.

What would you say are the biggest challenges facing a business like NWCE?



In addition to the challenges of supply chain stability and volatile costs for parts and appliances, there are other challenges facing a business like NWCE. One of them is keeping up with the latest industry trends and technology developments to ensure that the company remains competitive and relevant. Finally, there is the challenge of maintaining customer relationships and delivering a high level of customer service, which is essential for building a positive reputation and generating repeat business. In true NWCE style, we will tackle these challenges with a positive mindset, viewing them as opportunities rather than problems.

How has NWCE managed its growth?

NWCE has managed its growth by identifying key growth areas and investing in the necessary resources to sustain and accommodate the growth. This included adding to the workforce, investing in infrastructure and streamlining existing processes. For instance, we changed our CRM, accounting, design and estimating platforms, which helped stabilise the business and make it more efficient. We also invested in our award-winning field service engineering software, Bigchange, which provides real-time updates for clients, better route planning, and environmental impact efficiencies. We are managing to save 1.5 tons of CO_2 per van.

Additionally, NWCE uses Revit for design and 3D modelling, along with AutoQuotes for estimating, which has improved our product offering and saved time.

What do you see as the big growth hotspots for NWCE going forward?

We see growth opportunities in exploring new and emerging markets. We also believe that our commitment to environmental sustainability, such as investing in electric and hybrid vehicles, recycling and zero landfill initiatives will not only benefit the environment but also attract clients who value sustainability. Finally, our continued investment in the Ceda apprentice scheme and internal training and development programmes will allow us to future-proof our workforce and ensure we have the skilled staff to support our growth.

What's on the agenda for business in the remainder of 2023?

We have invested heavily in our in-house clean, test and repair department to deep clean, test and repair our clients' equipment to bring it up to good working order, allowing them to reuse more of their existing appliances. This initiative aligns with our clients' environmental sustainability goals, allowing them to re-purpose the existing equipment, reducing their carbon footprint and capital spend. We will focus on retaining our current accreditations, including SSIP, Safe Contractor, Constructionline Gold, Gas Safe and F-Gas. We will also continue our commitment to the Ceda apprentice scheme, internal training, and development. Finally, we will seek to expand into new and emerging markets.

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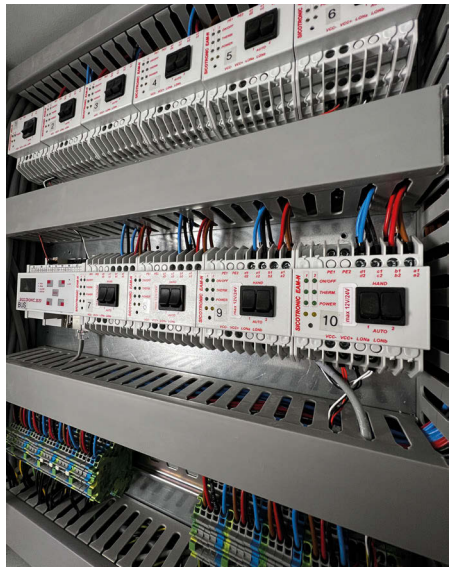
ENERGY OPTIMISATION IS THE ANSWER FOR TOP GASTROPUB

The Ginger Pig gastropub restaurant in Hove has a whole building electrical load capacity of 105kW, so when the design for a new electric kitchen came in with a theoretical load of over 140kW, it was clear that a solution was needed. Fortunately, technology had the answer.





Ben McKellar is renowned locally for his and wife Pamela's collection of gastropubs in Sussex and the Flint House small plate dining destination, so he knows a thing or two about what makes a commercial restaurant kitchen tick. So when the time came for a kitchen refurbishment at The Ginger Pig, he realised it was a fantastic opportunity to move away from gas to a more sustainable set-up.

But in making the commitment to a greener kitchen, it quickly became apparent that he faced a choice of two paths: he either needed to upgrade his electrical supply at a cost of £150,000, or apply the Sicotronic energy optimisation system from Ki-Tech.

Reducing peak load

Ki-Tech's system overcomes the issue of insufficient electrical supply in commercial kitchens, reducing the incoming power supply required. Originally developed to limit total load and combat the peak power charges that remain common in Europe, it works by redistributing available power to where it is needed – and only where it is needed.

The technology sets a threshold of power limitations and redistributes energy from connected appliances, ensuring that the threshold (effectively the limit of the available supply) is never exceeded without disturbing normal kitchen operations.

This enables the kitchen to operate well below the established load calculations – in The Ginger Pig's case, more than 50% below peak demand load.

When an appliance calls for power, a signal is sent via control modules to a central control unit. It scans all of the available appliances to check status and establish the overall electrical draw at that particular time. If power is available, it is delivered immediately – if not, it is delayed for a matter of seconds.

Operators will see no discernible drop in performance as the power is cut to elements only for a matter of seconds, but it is enough to redistribute the load and maintain within the threshold. The system also recognises where an appliance has a pre-heat function and will not begin optimisation until that target temperature has been reached.

Working to project deadlines

Local catering equipment distributor and kitchen design experts, Commercial Catering Contracts, were engaged to provide the design and project management at The Ginger Pig.

With a four-week total project timeline, tight management and liaison with all trades was essential. Ki-Tech worked alongside Commercial Catering Contracts and electrical specialists DMC Group to ensure the Sicotronic system was installed on time and in line with the programme.

A complete Menu System induction suite is the centrepiece, with Sicotronic also connected to the combi ovens, induction hob in the pastry section and hot pass. The infrastructure has been built to provide an element of futureproofing and to accommodate potential future equipment purchases in the dishwash area, too.

Ki-Tech operates the whole kitchen on no more than around 61kW, which is less than half of the design requirements.

The Sicotronic system works with a number of renowned equipment manufacturers, all of whom are fully conversant with the benefits of energy optimisation and readily incorporate the electrical interfaces within their product build.



THE PATH TO PRODUCTIVITY

Rational's iVario multifunctional cooking unit was developed with kitchen optimisation in mind. The manufacturer's UK technical sales director, Graham Kille, outlines exactly how and where it can add the most value to a catering project.

Today, both design and equipment are pivotal to the success of the modern professional kitchen. Flexible multi-functional cooking systems, such as the Rational iVario technologically advanced bratt pan, have many capabilities and benefits that contribute to kitchen optimisation.

By replacing an array of traditional kitchen equipment from bratt pans and stove tops to planchas and deep fryers, the iVario will save on kitchen space and help reduce unnecessary manual handling, thus improving health and safety procedures and efficiency in the work flow.

The iVario enhances the productivity of kitchen staff - all their efforts go into cooking and production, eliminating time wasted waiting for water in pots to heat up or reclaiming them from the wash-up.

With its multifunctionality, the iVario delivers maximum energy efficiency, optimising wasted heat emissions. Water usage is kept to a minimum and cooking processes are optimised with speed and flexibility. It's up to four times faster and uses up to 40% less energy than conventional equipment.

ConnectedCooking - Rational's cloud-based networking solution - also assists with optimisation in professional kitchens. Operators can cut out unnec-



"IT'S UP TO FOUR TIMES FASTER AND USES UP TO 40% LESS ENERGY THAN CONVENTIONAL EQUIPMENT"

essary paperwork, as the HACCP documentation is digitised. Operators can complete many tasks easily, regardless of where the cooking systems are located.

For example, with asset management, the user has an immediate overview of what is happening, thus significantly minimising inspection work. There's also the capability of programing menu processes, thus saving time, and with permission Rational service partners can access the iVario remotely for diagnosis and save on kitchen down-time.

Finally, foodservice operators are facing many challenges, including staff shortages, however multifunctional cooking systems can help to assist with attracting and retaining staff with their ease of use and intelligent functions.

'WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT SKILLS SHORTAGES IN THE KITCHEN'

Why clever design and advanced cooking systems can deliver a winning solution

The shortage of skilled staff is challenging the hospitality industry. At the same time, consumer expectations are ever higher and they want something special from restaurants. So how can the industry meet these challenges?

Rational says that rethinking kitchen design and using advanced cooking systems offers a solution. "Kitchen equipment can create better working conditions and thus help with staff recruitment and retention," says Ian Leadbetter, national corporate chef at Rational UK.

"A kitchen equipped with modern cooking systems is attractive - whereas older appliances can be difficult to work with. At the same time, digital technology and automation are popular with trainee chefs coming up through the ranks. Then there's the fact that modern cooking systems, such as the Rational iVario Pro, can take over many cooking processes, freeing up staff for other jobs and allowing them time for other tasks, for example costings and menu planning."

As cooking systems like the iVario Pro take over the time-consuming monitoring of the cooking process, all staff have to do is turn, pour or remove food from the pan when the cooking system signals. Plus, the iVario is up to four



times faster, yet requires up to 40% less energy, compared to conventional kitchen appliances. This speed can really increase productivity, even with fewer chefs in the kitchen.

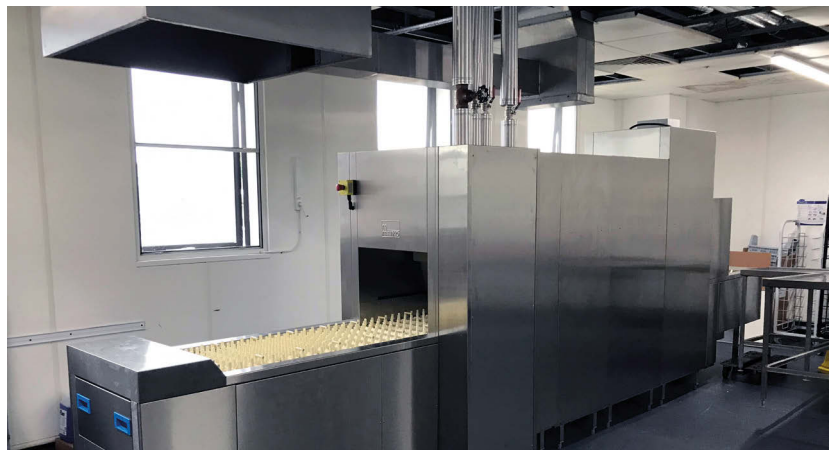
Features such as the AutoLift, which automatically lifts the food out of the oil or water once the cooking time has elapsed, also aid productivity - creating pasta al dente or crispy chips all without monitoring. Leadbetter concludes: "The results are top class, every time, thanks to the programming of the cooking paths. It couldn't be more reliable or simple."

KCS AND MEIKO COMBINE FOR KITCHEN OPTIMISATION AT MAIDSTONE HOSPITAL

Strong channel partnerships are vital to success, so when Kent Catering Service encountered a tricky project at Maidstone Hospital it had no qualms that it would be able to get the job done.

Kent Catering Service is proud of its ability to provide rapid response and a high level of first-time fix to its customers. But that can only be achieved through good working relationships with suppliers. It is a point not lost on sales manager, Paul Simpson, who says that coherency in terms of the service that it receives from suppliers can make a noticeable difference.

"The nature of our business is that we deal with, service and maintain all makes of equipment, so we regularly need spares and specialist technical information. Some companies, it must be said, are better than others to deal with," he explains.





Kent Catering Service's recent design and installation of a flight dishwashing system at Maidstone Hospital proves his point about customer service from suppliers. He regards Meiko as one of the best suppliers to deal with, particularly when it comes to speed of assistance with spare parts and technical information and support.

"We have often sent our engineers for training at Slough, which has super facilities, and we are never kept waiting for spares or technical information, unlike some other suppliers," he says. "Another point where Meiko scores strongly is their project management, which really helped us out during our installation of this large flight dishwashing machine at Maidstone Hospital.

"As any distributor knows, these larger projects rely on a number of parties coming together and working well - electricians, plumbers, builders, machine installers, as well as the client's own staff. Delays are not uncommon, and so flexibility is necessary for a successful outcome."

At Maidstone Hospital, KCS was working around others on site, and there were delays, so the flexibility of Meiko's engineers was extremely useful. "They came in and did what they could and then



"AS ANY DISTRIBUTOR KNOWS, THESE LARGER PROJECTS RELY ON A NUMBER OF PARTIES COMING TOGETHER AND WORKING WELL"

left the site while the other contractors or workers completed their tasks.

"Then Meiko's engineers came back to finish off, and even then they proved again how flexible they were because some of the return dates changed at the last minute! We look after quite a few hospital trusts and have lots of experience with large dishwash systems, but I have rarely seen support like Meiko is able to offer. Now the client is happy, and we are satisfied that we have given good service," he adds.

Meiko UK's managing director, Paul Anderson, says that the 'service' provided by catering equipment distributors is a key ingredient to the future sustainability of the UK public sector.

"Using better cooking, dishwashing and food waste recycling equipment will improve sustainability and reduce environmental impact. But catering equipment suppliers need to do more than shift boxes of equipment. Staff and managers must know how to plan and run a food operation 'sustainably' using minimal water, chemicals and energy over the lifetime of that equipment. That is why catering equipment suppliers need to improve their service - over the lifetime of their kit!"

ACHIEVING OPTIMAL WAREWASH DESIGN

Kent Catering Service and Meiko worked closely on the specification and installation of a flight dishwashing system at Maidstone Hospital – and key to the success of that project was the initial work that the pair carried out to ensure the client received the optimal solution.

Meiko UK director, Paul Anderson, explains: "A pre-sale survey of Maidstone Hospital's kitchen considered the constraints of the space available, as you might expect. But Meiko's job, and that of Kent Catering Service, is to create the 'optimised kitchen', so working together, the companies assessed the ergonomics, efficiency, ventilation and food waste disposal issues involved."

Errors in commercial kitchen planning usually only become apparent with hindsight. Common problems include poor ergonomics, which leads to excessive lifting, bending or stretching, overlapping routes for different tasks and a lack of sufficient work surfaces or places to 'dump' dirty crockery and wares before washing. Insufficient ventilation in the kitchen space can pose a challenge, while unsuitable warewashing technology is another issue that frequently springs up.

"Whether planning a brand new dishwashing area or renovating an existing one, it is crucially important to use experienced experts who understand dishwash design and all the other factors, such as ergonomics," adds Anderson. "Getting these issues right means the dishwash is optimised for economy as well as peak efficiency and safety."

A 2019 survey of sickness absence as a percentage of Full Time Equivalent showed levels of absence among all NHS staff groups recorded as 5.4% for back problems and 10.4% for 'other musculoskeletal problems'. But among workers in the hotel, property and estates departments, including the kitchen and dishwash areas, these figures rose to 7.1% and 14.6%, respectively.

"Employees in commercial kitchens and dishwash areas must work at full capacity daily," says Anderson. "They tend to be on their feet more than in many other professions, often working physically demanding jobs involving lifting and carrying. Smart kitchen and dishwash optimisation planning reduces the risk of injury and good ergonomic design cuts staff absences. For example, the design of the M-iQ dishwasher at Maidstone includes an extended unloading section which helps give staff more space to unload the machine, reducing the risk of excessive bending or stretching and allowing the kitchen to add extra staff at peak times, spreading the workload as evenly as possible."

Ergonomics expert Professor Peter Schwarz calculated that if the temperature in the kitchen increases to 28°C, productivity drops to 70%. At 33 °C, it drops even further, to 50%. The right dishwashing technology contributes to air management, further enhancing kitchen optimisation because it ensures the dishwash area is kept to an optimum working temperature.

"Meiko rack and flight machines are designed to maximise heat recovery, ensuring the exhaust air volume exits the machine at 22°C," says Anderson. "This usually ensures a direct exhaust air connection is unnecessary - and at Maidstone only a conventional extract hood needed to be placed over the unloading section. M-iQ machines wash and sanitise thousands of pieces of crockery per hour, and they emerge dry and hot; the extract hood removes the radiated heat from the plates."

A KITCHEN FULL OF POSSIBILITIES

UNOX DELIVERS INSIGHT AND SOLUTIONS WHEN OPTIMISING A PROFESSIONAL SETTING

In today's commercial kitchen environment, every gesture has a precise meaning, every action has a purpose and every appliance needs to deliver a solution to a known pain point. Unox's UK managing director, Scott Duncan, explains how its innovations fit into this equation.



It is common knowledge that kitchens are shrinking, predominately to increase front-of-house space for customers. Simultaneously, a drive for cost-cutting is increasingly seeing fewer chefs operate within a professional kitchen. Combined, these factors are leading to a requirement for catering equipment to be both multifunctional and space efficient – ultimately optimising today's kitchen set-up.

Working directly with chefs, operators, dealers and distributors across the world, Unox has been at the forefront of equipment innovation and kitchen optimisation. From the development of compact trolly combi ovens, traditionally found in busy, high-footfall kitchens such as healthcare and contract catering sites, to pioneering EVEREO, the world's first hot fridge or SPEED-X, the first ever self-washing combi speed oven, Unox has continually pushed boundaries of what is possible.



"In our view, kitchen optimisation comes in several forms," explains UK managing director Scott Duncan. "Whether it's space, speed or flexibility, enhanced optimisation allows a kitchen to run more efficiently, with fewer staff, smaller sites, higher output and even lower costs. Incorporating ground-breaking technological development with the latest manufacturing techniques, Unox has been able to develop a series of solutions which are designed to drive kitchen optimisation.

"Hot food preservation is increasingly becoming a mainstay in commercial kitchen settings. Enabling fewer chefs to prepare dishes ahead of service, the technology maintains quality, flavour, texture and taste on even the most delicate of ingredients, then allowing for immediate service when required. What's more, the technology has been shown to significantly reduce food waste, something that can further boost kitchen optimisation."

By its very design, EVEREO from Unox gives a chef the ultimate decision of when and where to cook their food. Offering the ability to pre-prepare complex dishes during quieter periods or even in a separate prep kitchen set-up, EVEREO, the world's





"WHETHER IT'S SPACE, SPEED OR FLEXIBILITY, ENHANCED OPTIMISATION ALLOWS A KITCHEN TO RUN MORE EFFICIENTLY, WITH FEWER STAFF, SMALLER SITES, HIGHER OUTPUT AND EVEN LOWER COSTS"

first hot fridge, preserves hot food at its ideal serving temperature for up to 72 hours.

Holding hot food above temperatures at which bacteria thrive, while maintaining quality, texture and taste, EVEREO can guarantee safety and support busy kitchens to maintain service standards.

"When it comes to hot food preservation, safety is paramount," says Duncan. "That's why we're delighted that EVEREO has recently been HACCP International Certified. Independently tested in Europe and Australia, EVEREO technology consistently demonstrated flawless microbiological safety, while creating unrivalled preservation of food quality. What's more, it's the first and only hot-holding appliance to be HACCP Internationally Certified."

The EVEREO range is available in three unique sizes for maximum flexibility. The line features a 900 model and a 600 model, both featuring the space for 10 GN 1/1 trays (the larger model allows trays to be loaded lengthways, while the smaller allows the trays to be loaded from the shortest side), and the cube, a countertop version with capacity for up to 10 GN 2/3 trays. What's more, all the units are powered through a standard 13-amp three-pin plug.

It's not just in hot food preservation where Unox has advanced the possibilities of kitchen optimisation. Increasingly, customers are becoming expectant that the food they order is fresh, nutritious and served quickly. This is nowhere more evident than in the grab-and-go sector, notes Duncan.

"Queues and increased waiting time is a no, with customers tending to choose alternatives based on their perceived expectation of the length of a queue. To combat waiting times and help drive efficiency in a business, Unox launched SPEED-X, the first ever self-washing combi speed oven.

"Delivering the perfect combination of quality and speed, unimaginable performance and no compromise - one oven, three cooking modes - SPEED-X harnesses the power of combi, the speed of microwave and the precision of steam."

SPEED-X offers a capacity of up to 10 GN 2/3 trays and a dedicated SPEED.Plate position, allowing an operator to perform up to four accelerated cooking functions at once - ideal for high footfall sites.

It helps to achieve greater kitchen optimisation in more ways than purely its cooking capability. The unique ROTAR. Klean automatic washing system integrates a one-litre tank, water filtration system and intelligent sensors to provide up to 2,000 litres of filtered water and instinctive wash cycle suggestions, based on the level of cleaning required. Controlling the technology is a breeze, thanks to the advanced Digital.ID user interface. A simple, fresh digital platform allows the operator to monitor and control their oven with a single touch.

Duncan says that EVEREO and SPEED-X are independently able to deliver both speed and convenience in a kitchen, but they are also designed to come together in one, delivering the highest level of space optimisation.

"A stackable column that's just 535mm wide x 883mm deep, EVEREO and SPEED-X deliver the ability for a chef to pre-prepare and hold a range of dishes, before quickly and consistently finishing them in just a matter of minutes during service. Not only can this help with speed of service, but it removes the guesswork to help dramatically reduce food waste, too," he says.

What's more, both EVEREO and SPEED-X can achieve ongoing energy savings, too. "It's a truly revolutionary piece of equipment and, best of all, the cost to run the column is minimal when compared to alternative cook-hold methods," insists Duncan. "For example, it costs just £1 to run an EVEREO unit for a 12-hour period - a figure rapidly offset by greater optimisation, less food waste and ultimately more consistent results."

For more information on Unox, visit **www.unox.com/en_gb** or call **01252 851522**

THE TASK MASTERS



During tough times for operators, high quality food preparation appliances can make all the difference to busy kitchens and keep profit margins intact.



As operators contend with rising energy costs and a difficult labour market, the role that quality food prep equipment can play in making these challenges a little more bearable has certainly come to the fore.

Manufacturers of commercial food prep equipment are finding ways to push the envelope in order to provide solutions that are easy to use and reduce the level of manpower needed to fly through those essential tasks that often need to be completed before service begins.

"We all know that there is a massive issue with finding reliable, skilled kitchen staff right now, especially when it comes to manual tasks such as preparing fruit and vegetables," says Neil Richards, managing director of Metcalfe Catering Equipment.

"Our entire range of food prep equipment is designed to automate these tasks and make the operator less reliant on kitchen staff. And, as well as labour saving, they get accurate, high quality, consistent results for greater yield, better quality, and higher margins.

With food inflation where it is right now, the accuracy of cutting, slicing and dicing with a machine, as opposed to doing it by hand, is another major benefit," notes Richards. "Imagine you are business slicing significant quantities of tomatoes or lemons on a daily basis. Over the course of a year, getting one or two more slices from each will lead to savings that run into thousands of pounds meaning that the machine pays for itself very quickly."

Nathan Osborne, training and development chef at Foodservice Equipment Marketing (FEM), says that operators realise how much of a difference the right appliances can make, particularly as the payback is often clear from the word go.

"The last couple of years have seen many businesses facing difficulties in finding skilled staff, and staff shortages are likely to remain a problem for the foreseeable future," he says. "With this in mind, operators will continue to look for food prep equipment that saves time and money, has energy-saving features and is easy to use. Equipment that requires little to no training and offers menu

"WE ALL KNOW THAT THERE IS A MASSIVE ISSUE WITH FINDING RELIABLE, SKILLED KITCHEN STAFF RIGHT NOW, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO MANUAL TASKS SUCH AS PREPARING FRUIT AND VEGETABLES"







versatility will be favoured over more complicated models," he predicts.

More automation

Given that current challenges are unlikely to dissipate anytime soon, the onus is on suppliers to engineer further value from the machines that they offer. Michael Eyre, product director at Jestic Foodservice Solutions, says the challenge is to support demand for energy efficient and multi-use equipment that can provide speed and savings for kitchens seeking to reduce the amount of time spent on repetitive and time-consuming manual preparation.

"I believe we will continue to see more and more automation and more user-friendly features," he says. "I expect items such as the range of pre-set programmes to increase as manufacturers respond to the changing way operators are currently preparing food."

As with any part of the catering equipment sector, the food prep market is constantly innovating and developing. Driven by operator demand, the market is increasingly seeing a focus on food provenance and

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SPOTLIGHT: FOOD PREP INNOVATIONS

Metcalfe Catering Equipment is one of the most established suppliers of food prep equipment to the UK market and represents top brands such as Hallde. Key additions to the range include the **RG250 diwash veg prep machine** and the **EC20 fully automatic high volume chipper**. The RG250 diwash carries out very precise cutting, slicing and dicing of fresh produce to maximise the yield. Likewise, the EC-20 makes sure that none of the potato is wasted. Both machines have removable parts that can be put through the dishwasher to keep them clean, and the blades can also be removed for sharpening. In the case of both machines, they allow the operator to prep only what they need. Instead of buying in pre-prepared produce or potatoes, the operator can buy in raw ingredients, which are normally cheaper to buy, and then prep them as and when required which generally results in better margins, too.

There has been a lot of innovation in the food prep sector in recent times and the blender category is no exception. The market has seen the introduction of pre-set programmes and specialised blend techniques, along with more powerful motors which have enhanced blend speed. These innovations are helping operators deliver efficiencies in food preparation and allocate more time to other key areas such as menu development.

Jestic Foodservice Solutions carries the Vitamix range in the UK and the **Vitamix XL** is the brand's largest capacity countertop blender to date, enabling up to 24 servings (240ml) to be blended at once. Its huge 5.6-litre container can help take the place of multiple machines as it is capable of grinding spices, chopping salsas, puréeing root vegetables and emulsifying dressings.

Over at FEM, the company has recently added more lines to its range of vacuum packers from Sirman. These are competitively priced and offer new ways to use vacuum packing techniques, which are useful for a diverse range of food prep methods. These new additions include **Sirman external vacuum packers**, which are available in two sizes, and offer a simple-to-use method of vacuum processing containers, and the **Sirman compact vertical vacuum packer**, which is ideal for processing liquids, granulates and powders.

CuisinEquip distributes the Italian-made Bottene range of commercial pasta-making machines. The most recent addition to its portfolio is the **BE90 ravioli maker**, a compact machine that is designed to quickly and effortlessly fill and seal up to 120 individual ravioli per minute. With a wide range of ravioli moulds available - including square, triangle, half-moon and rectangular - the BE90 ravioli maker gives operators complete choice over the type of pasta added to their menu.

A new innovation from De Buyer, which is represented by Signature FSE in the UK, is the **Le Tube multi-purpose pressure piston**. Eliminating the need for single-use plastic piping bags, and delivering greater precision to chefs, Le Tube is designed to transform dessert production. Ideal for filling, decorating, dosing and forming, the easy to clean and simple to operate mechanism allows patisserie teams to focus more on creativity. Le Tube isn't restricted purely to cold applications, as it works just as well with hot food, allowing precision plating and piping as well as delicate finishing touches.



sustainability, which in turn is having a knock-on effect on developments in equipment.

"More and more, operators are moving away from pre-produced foods, choosing to use high quality ingredients which deliver a 'homemade' dish, and this is certainly the case with pasta," says Steve Elliott, sales director at Valentine and CuisinEquip, which distributes the Italian range of pasta-making machines.

"A key part of many menus, artisan pasta can be simple and cost-effective to make, while also giving a significant tick in that homemade box. By producing in-house, operators can choose recipes that suit their customers, including those with dietary requirements, and can be significantly more cost-effective when compared to buying readymade alternatives."

Metcalfe is seeing a move towards more automated preparation of fresh produce because many operators just don't have the time, or indeed the staff, to do this in-house. Moreover, fresh produce is expensive and with many operators unable to accurately predict the number of customers who are going to come through the door during any given service period they don't know how much to prep in advance - if they do too much this can lead to wastage and a reduction in GP, says Neil Richards.

"I EXPECT ITEMS SUCH AS THE RANGE OF PRE-SET PROGRAMMES TO INCREASE AS MANUFACTURERS RESPOND TO THE CHANGING WAY OPERATORS ARE CURRENTLY PREPARING FOOD"



"Being able to prepare smaller amounts of fresh produce quickly, using a machine, rather than preparing a large amount manually in advance, can help to reduce wastage. We are also seeing increased demand for high volume food preparation machines. This is the case in both foodservice, where the rise of dark kitchens and CPUs calls for larger volumes, and in retail, with more and more supermarkets offering pre-prepared fresh produce.

"Lastly, the rising popularity of high quality charcuterie is leading to operators going in search of specialist food preparation equipment that can maximise the yield, and therefore the profit, of what are often premium quality ingredients - think of products such as bresaola and Iberico ham."

Flexible solutions

Paula Sherlock, managing director of Signature FSE, says that with all the challenges faced by operators, it is observing a growing need for flexibility and versatility. "Chefs are nimble in their thinking and the equipment they use needs to help them do that. With many sites downsizing, equipment that is easy to store or fulfils more than one purpose is becoming ever more important," she notes.

Sherlock cites mandolines as an example of where chefs need more flexibility than a chef's knife, but where a food processor wouldn't offer optimal control over the final task.

"De Buyer's range of high-quality stainless steel mandolines have blades that can cube, slice, julienne, waffle cut and more. Delivering the best results, even with the softest ingredients, the mandoline is easy to clean, simple to store and gives perfect results in even the smallest of kitchens."

One area that has already seen demand increase and is something that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future is hot food preservation. Allowing a busy kitchen to prepare and cook foods during quieter periods or enabling dark kitchens to prepare foods before transporting them to restaurants, hot food preservation technology can speed up service time, drive consistency and reduce the demands put on a kitchen brigade.

Unox is big in this area with its Evereo system. It uses state-of-the-art technology to maintain precise temperature and humidity control, preserving cooked foods for up to 72 hours. UK managing director, Scott Duncan, says Evereo is capable of reducing electricity consumption and food waste, while speeding up service.

"Without a doubt, the focus for chefs and operators of commercial kitchens right now is driving efficiency - whether that be energy efficiency, labour efficiency, convenience or speed of service. While many automated food prep appliances are designed to drive one of these elements, few are able to achieve several or all of these in one handy appliance," he says.

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PLUGGED IN

Plug and play products can be especially useful in scenarios where space is limited or lower power requirements are necessary. *CateringInsight.com* highlights a selection of plug and play appliances that dealers need to keep on their radar for just the right occasion.

HUGENTOBLER HOLD-O-MAT HOLDING UNIT

The Swiss made Hugentobler Hold-o-mat holding cabinet offers the ability to cook at very low temperatures, as well as cook and hold. Such are the dehumidifying qualities of the Hold-o-mat that even crispy food will retain its crunch when holding, and its folding handles make it fully transportable, which means cook and hold for delivery of food to a location away from the main kitchen, such as a marquee or satellite kitchen, is no problem at all.

This smart piece of kit will maintain temperature to within +/- 1°C, thanks to its unique temperature and humidity control and a total of 18-24 metres of the finest heating cable ensures the temperature is uniform, even with repeated door opening. The Hold-o-mat will cook meat with 10% to 20% less weight loss and as it runs using only 0.4kW/h, it is 10 times more energy efficient than a combi steamer. The Hugentobler Hold-o-mat comes in four sizes, is stackable, and has reversible door hinges.





HATCO SNACK SYSTEM

The Hatco Snack System is available as a single or dual electric appliance, with a series of interchangeable plates to serve breakfast items, hot sandwiches, paninis or a range of dessert snacks such as waffles, donuts and churros. Perfect for any café, coffee shop or dessert-led restaurant, the Hatco Snack System offers versatility across all meal times. The compact design with easily interchangeable plates ensures it is suitable for even the smallest of kitchen spaces - a multifunctional appliance that doesn't compromise on counter space.

The Hatco Snack System is stocked in the UK and available from Hatco's UK sales partner Pro Foodservice Reps, giving a versatile product for a wide range of menu items across all meal times. Key features include adjustable time and temperature controls which enable operators to cook continuous, consistent quality products, and exclusive heating elements to ensure even cooking every time. Easy to use for kitchen staff of all competencies, the Snack System comes with four programmable preset buttons for each cooking cycle and one-touch release with latch opener for easy plate replacement. It also offers easy cleaning, with interchangeable plates that can be easily cleaned with warm, soapy water, together with inclusive cleaning brush.



ANTUNES ES-1200 EGG STATION

The Antunes Egg Station uses heat and steam to cook perfectly moist and delicious eggs in a matter of minutes. With the Antunes Egg Station, which is available through Jestic Foodservice Solutions, any operation can easily serve a made-to-order egg or egg sandwich. Using a combination of heat from the grill surface and steam, this unit cooks perfectly cooked eggs every time, while the non-stick rings give the product its shape.

Eggs are the cornerstone of every successful breakfast menu. Some of the biggest operators in the QSR, casual dining and hospitality sectors around the world rely on Antunes to ensure quality, consistency, and speed of service. Whether its new menu items or extended hours, operations can continue to serve breakfast items without worrying about cross-contamination or sacrificing space on the grill. With an impressive cook time of just 120-150 seconds, the Antunes Egg Station ES range also has a small footprint to easily fit into any operation.



MERRYCHEF CONNEX HIGH-SPEED OVENS

The Merrychef conneX range of high speed ovens is the epitome of everything an operator demands for flexible and easy to use kitchen equipment. Ventless, compact and with cool touch sides, the ovens will slide effortlessly into small spaces and operate quietly, making them perfect for front-of-house or kitchen positions. Easy to install, with energy-saving efficiencies, standard power units operate off a 13-amp plug, with quick pre-heat and cool down times and reduced energy in standby.

Welbilt claims that Merrychef conneX delivers speeds up to 80% faster than other cooking methods, addressing sector demands for space and efficiency. Connectivity has become a real driver for the industry and the units allow operators to upload menus at the touch of a button. Each model boasts an incredibly intuitive seven-inch HD controller that utilises the language of mobile phones, making this image-based touchscreen easy to use and ensuring that training new staff is a straightforward process.

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VITO VM PORTABLE OIL FILTRATION SYSTEM

The new Vito vacuum range, and specifically the XM, is designed for large sites and those with a high footfall. The units are portable, use a standard 240v connection and can filter as much as 30 litres of oil at temperatures of up to 200°C per minute. They are even capable of pumping the clean, clear and freshly filtered oil back into the vat to eliminate any contact with hot oil. The XM is one of the largest models in Vito's product portfolio, featuring a 75-litre tank and innovative vacuum-filtration technology.

Requiring less than five minutes to extract, filter and automatically return the oil to the frying vat, the Vito XM can even be used during a busy shift, maintaining the quality, clarity and colour of cooking oil used. By removing the manual filtration and cleaning process, the Vito XM can also help to reduce the labour demands that busy professional kitchens currently face. Vito systems are distributed by fryer specialist Valentine Equipment in the UK.



CLIFTON FOOD RANGE SOUS VIDE WATER BATHS

Challenging perceptions and delivering quality is at the core of Clifton Food Range's portfolio of sous vide water baths. Once the preserve of more technical kitchens, Clifton products are truly plug and play, working off standard UK 13-amp wall sockets. Simple to operate, consistent in performance and built to the highest standards of the pharmaceutical industry, these can genuinely change kitchens and improve service.

Alongside simplicity, sous vide technology also offers savings in both energy and food wastage, with food only cooked to order, and the remainder chilled until the next service. Each unit also uses significantly less energy than conventional oven or hob cooking as unlike a gas range, for example, energy is not constantly being applied. Energy is used periodically to maintain the set temperature of the water bath, applying heat only as required and the integrated, intelligent controller limits this to a minimum.



HALLDE CC34 COMBI CUTTER

As both a vegetable preparation machine and vertical cutter in one machine, the Hallde CC34 is the perfect solution for small kitchens. It slices, dices, shreds, grates and cuts julienne, making it ideal for vegetables, fruit, dry bread and cheese. It will also chop and grind meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, and nuts. In addition, it can be used for blending, as well as mixing sauces, soups and dressings, and will prepare produce at up to 2kg per minute.

Robustly built in ABS-plastic with an ergonomic user-friendly design, the Hallde CC34 has four speeds and a pulse function, and uses a patented three arm scraper system. It is easy to clean and all loose parts and cutting tools can be washed in a dishwasher. Any site that needs to prep vegetables and is short on space - both in terms of countertop and storage - will find the CC34 a valuable addition to the kitchen set-up.



UNOX EVEREO FOOD PRESERVATION UNIT

As a plug-and-play appliance capable of pushing the boundaries of innovation, Evereo can significantly save on energy and labour, speeding up service times and virtually eliminating food waste. Ideal for hot food preservation, dehumidifying, sous vide and overnight cooking, Evereo operates from a standard 13-amp socket and is available in a choice of two floor-standing and a countertop model, representing a major step forward in plug-and-play solutions for commercial kitchens.

To get the most from the unit, Unox has also launched the Multi.Day bags and Multi.Day trays - the first and only technology that allows a chef to vacuum-pack trays of hot food straight out of the oven. Using a patented 13-amp Multi.Day hot vacuum pump, operators can preserve food at the perfect serving temperature for up to 72 hours. Ideal for any kitchen, the vacuum trays and bags can achieve flexibility and durability.

FRI-JADO MTT DISPLAY CABINET

The brand new MTT is designed for sites looking to display hot, wrapped food, keeping it in the optimum conditions in order to extend shelf life, while finding themselves limited on available space. Designed with energy saving in mind, the MTT takes much of the technology found in the larger models in the range - ultimately putting food in the spotlight in order to drive impulse sales in the lucrative grab-and-go market.

Delivering the maximum transparency focus from the larger units in the range, the countertop heated unit combines a small footprint with the latest technology to preserve hot food and extend shelf life. A multi-temperature feature allows operators to hold a range of food in the same unit, while the hot blanket technology saves up to 50% of energy consumption compared to similar models on the market. Sold back or rear loading models are available as well as a choice of two widths.





CARPIGIANI DREAM FROZEN DRINK MACHINE

The Dream frozen drink machine helps operators create a continuous supply of frozen cocktails and beverages. The visually stunning machine creates maximum impact with its sleek appearance and colour change LED sequence. Combining usability and sustainability, the high capacity machine delivers frozen drinks within an impressive 20 minutes of initial start-up and then offers continuous supply at a perfect consistency if the hopper is topped up.

Supplying 125 x 400ml servings per hour running from a 13-amp plug, the Dream is perfect for front-of-house countertops and is ready to go to create additional profit for any operation looking to offer frozen cocktails or drinks. Featuring Carpigiani's exclusive vertical ventilation technology, the Dream can be installed without clearance space, and at only 40cm wide it offers unbeatable performance and results as well as a stunning design. The direct drive cylinder mixer motor and brushless hopper mixer motor deliver improved efficiencies and reliability as well as reducing noise output.



RIEBER K-POT ELECTRIC CHAFING DISH

BGL Rieber insists this electric chafing dish is better than traditional chafers because the entire GN K-Pot surface is heated, and controls are sensitive enough to prevent burning. K-Pot is ideal where space and power are limited and the low power requirements are ideal for setting up food displays anywhere in schools, universities, hotels, conference events, care homes and stadia. K-Pot is lightweight and fully mobile, adding value by creating a professional food display anywhere with electric power, with the bonus of no smells from gel heaters, proven safety in use and consistently even cooking or heating. It is most effective for hot and cold food display, buffet and assisted meal service and for use with delivered meals.

The key benefits of K-Pot are portability, professional appearance and versatility in cooking, allowing users to hold food hot and operate the systems remotely using a smartphone app. Customers scan the bar code on the GN container using the K-Pot app, and this tells K-Pot Connect how to regenerate or hot hold the food in question. This smart app-controlled functionality is especially relevant in an industry short of staff and struggling to cope with demand post-covid. K-Pot Connect expands the caterer's ability to offer food without needing extra staff.

FULL EXPENSING CAN GIVE MORE CUSTOMERS ACCESS TO BETTER EQUIPMENT

A government initiative that provides added incentive for businesses who may otherwise be reluctant to invest when it's most necessary could benefit the catering equipment industry, writes **Rebecca Vincent**, UK commercial director at **Foster** and **Gamko**.





Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's announcement of new measures to make the UK's tax system more competitive and supportive of enterprise during the 2023 Spring Budget was, by and large, met with a degree of hope within the catering equipment industry.

Hunt's introduction of two major new capital allowances – Full Expensing (FE) for certain plant and machinery costs; and 50% First-Year Allowance (FYA) for longer term investments such as solar panels - is certainly a positive measure to hold on to, a step in the right direction despite the need for additional support, too.

Capital allowances – a type of tax relief for businesses that allow them to deduct some or all of the cost of an item from their profits before paying tax – are not new. Put simply, they're measures introduced with the aim of promoting conditions for enterprise to succeed and to encourage economic growth.

At face value, they're also an important vote of confidence from the government in a world where cost of living and subsequently, running a business, is more challenging than ever.

The popular Super Deduction scheme, which was introduced in April 2021 was the single biggest tax incentive any UK government had ever offered businesses looking to invest in equipment. Allowing companies to cut their tax bill by up to 25p for every £1 spent on new plant and machinery, its termination in March this year had loomed.

"DEPENDING ON NET PROFIT, IT OFFERS A TAX SAVING OF BETWEEN 19P AND 25P FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED ON NEW PLANT AND MACHINERY"

Full Expensing, announced in the Spring Budget just before the super deduction expired, provides a similar saving to the Super Deduction in that, depending on net profit, it offers a tax saving of between 19p and 25p for every £1 invested on new plant and machinery.

It's an allowance which we're welcoming at Foster and Gamko. Investing in the best quality, cutting-edge refrigeration equipment can make a huge difference to the overall performance of a hospitality business, driving down costs in other areas such as energy and labour, and eliminating risk to food safety.

If businesses are considering an upgrade to their refrigeration equipment or their kitchen needs a bit of an overhaul, the introduction of FE makes it a great opportunity to take action now. That said, with many businesses struggling for cash flow, when they most need to invest in reliable, sustainable equipment, the initial capital outlay of state-of-the-art machinery can be a stumbling block.

Full Expensing offers a fantastic extra incentive for businesses who may otherwise be reluctant to invest when it's most necessary. What's more, when combined with Foster's interest-free credit scheme - which allows for equipment to be paid over 12, 18 or 24 months - it makes now a great time to invest in quality, reliable refrigeration.

For smaller catering businesses looking to grow, the government's support doesn't stop at Full Expensing. A new simplified tax system that's being introduced can also help free up the valuable time and money that's absolutely essential when running a small business.

Look out for changes that have recently been made to the Enterprise Management Incentives (EMI) scheme. This will simplify the process to grant options and reduce the administrative burden on participating companies – it will become easier to apply for grants to invest in the best equipment for your business – allowing businesses to upgrade their refrigeration capabilities even more easily.



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