



Sourcing the right drinks machines for your office space



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Introduction

Are you a busy office or facilities manager? Then this guide is for you.

Whether you're hugely experienced or new to the task of sourcing office drinks equipment and supplies, you will find lots of useful information here to make your job easier.

Choosing an office drinks supplier is not something you do every day – not even if you specialise in office moves and relocation. Tastes change, suppliers change and the products available change too. So, just where do you start?

We have organised our Guide to give you a useful checklist of the things to think about, as you find the solution that is right for your office and staff.





Start with the essentials

Every company is different and every office has different needs. But whatever your business, one thing's for sure, you want to make sure your staff, customers and visitors all have great tasting drinks to enjoy. This is not such a daunting task if you start by asking yourself some key questions:

1. How many people have you got in your office?
2. How much do they drink? (Suppliers usually measure this in cups per day.)
3. What sort of quality are you aiming for?
4. Does your drinks equipment have to look good too?
5. Do you have a fixed budget?
6. Do you need different solutions for different areas – your reception area, staff floors, board and meeting rooms, for example?

So let's look at some of these in a little more detail.

How much is too much?

Your approach to office drinks will undoubtedly be influenced by the type of company you are working for.

The infrastructure of an office is often counted as a cost. Some companies are fairly cost sensitive about their benefits and employee package. Others are more generous. In either case, the more a business gives to its staff, the higher its costs will be. The larger the business, the more significant this investment becomes, although there are economies of scale of course, so the cost per employee reduces as staff numbers grow.

Budgeting is a commercial reality. You can't always afford to give everyone exactly what they want. But if you shop wisely, you can make sure you get the most bang for your buck. You can also think creatively. You could combine free drinks alongside a coin-operated bean-to-cup machine that freshly grinds the beans for every cup. It gives staff a choice – if they fancy splashing out on a treat, they can do so without facing the elements – and for an awful lot less than they'll pay at the local coffee shop.

Costing for taste

Better tasting coffee costs more, right? Actually it's not quite that simple.

You might be surprised to learn that, cost-wise, there's not much difference between a bean-to-cup coffee and a filter coffee. What makes the difference is whether it's instant or fresh.

Instant coffee is about half the cost of a fresh cup. A cup of instant coffee might cost the company approximately 7p a cup. Fresh coffee – whether filtered or bean-to-cup – will cost you around 11p-13p a cup.

At Roast & Ground, we can help you choose the right drinks for your office space. We have in-house experts who deliver tasting sessions on a regular basis to help you choose suitable coffee blends so everyone's taste buds are satisfied. Not only that, upon request, we can even provide machine demonstrations, so you know exactly what it is you're buying. So you don't waste a penny!



Who breaks for coffee when?

How does your business organise coffee breaks? This can make a big difference to the equipment you need to choose.

If staff are required to take short, planned breaks all at the same time, an instant coffee machine, which takes 10-15 seconds to make a drink, may be the best solution. Think about the number of people who will need to be catered for. If everyone has the same 15-minute break, will there be queues?

By contrast, where staff take more varied breaks, or there are fewer of them, a bean-to-cup coffee machine with fresh milk will take around 45 seconds to produce each great quality drink. So the type of drinks machine you choose for your office environment does matter.



What do you need where?

What do you need for your meeting rooms or breakout areas? A simple solution that provides black coffee? Or something more sophisticated?

If the drinks machine is noisy, you may not want it in the meeting room itself. The quietest way to provide coffee is to pour from a jug – this allows everyone to help themselves to a drink when they wish, without disturbing the flow of the meeting.

Do you want to rival the café chains, or are your staff happy with a smaller range of options?

Or are you looking for an attractive machine for communal spaces?

You also need to ask if your staff are willing to learn how to maintain your new drinks machines. If not, you will either need your cleaners to take on the job or your machine supplier might offer a cleaning service.

Choosing the right quality

We have talked a bit about coffee quality. But you may want to choose a machine that delivers drinks other than coffee – leaf tea and hot chocolate, soup or cold drinks, for example.

If you have an office full of committed tea drinkers, you need machines that reach the maximum water temperature. At Roast & Ground, we specifically check the hot water temperature if making tea is important. We also provide tea display stands alongside tabletop machines for example, so your staff have choice when they take their break.

Whatever you are choosing, our advice is to do a taste test. The claims made by manufacturers don't always stack up. The good news is that once you've narrowed down the options, many suppliers are happy to offer demonstrations. This might be at your offices, at a showroom, or even at another customer's site.

Getting your colleagues together to try out some coffee blends could help you meet the taste preferences of your staff. You might ask them to make note of what they like and why. Not only will staff feel appreciated by the gesture, it's a short-cut for you.

One word of caution though! Make sure you only offer realistic options. It won't play well to try out a machine that everyone loves, only to pick another for cost reasons.

Current office trends

Coffee drinking has become something of an institution in the last decade or so. London streets are choc full of coffee shops and other operations are getting in on the act.

This inevitably has had an impact on the office market. Far fewer offices resort to a tin and spoon, as their workers have become more discerning. In recent years, many companies have been willing to find ways to offer fresh milk too.

London and other major cities tend to be at the forefront of these trends – and when it comes to drinks equipment this is definitely true. Businesses are increasingly willing to choose from the wide range of options offered by today's drinks market, as part of their overall staff package.

Many of Roast & Ground's customers tell us their staff arrive 10 minutes early to meetings to make sure they can settle down with a nice cup of coffee in hand. With fresh grinding of beans for every cup a particular favourite, staff are enjoying little perks of the job, while the company finds that the right office coffee machine can be critical to its day-to-day operations. You can't underestimate the feel-good factor. Decent staff drinks can contribute to a feeling of being valued and, in return, the commitment staff are prepared to offer.

At the same time, work environments have also changed. Many offices now have open-plan spaces for desks, supported by large-break-out areas for sharing ideas and informal meetings. Private meetings are held in separate rooms. Drinks machines need to complement these different arrangements.

Of course CSR credentials have also become an important factor in the office environment. Over the years it has become more and more common for our customers to look to us to help them meet their company CSR commitments. Working to make sure we both make the right choices when it comes to reuse and recycling, how we pay and treat our staff and more.





Another trend to consider is the growing interest in what we are consuming. Some staff may want the option of a healthier choice in drinks – for example, choosing skimmed milk for their latté. Some people are really keen on fresh milk, while others are satisfied with a granular option – it can certainly make life easier operationally. Technological advances make granular milk a surprisingly tasty and healthy option – nowadays, it's simply skimmed milk that has been granulated, with nothing added at all. And of course, there are low-sugar options, chocolates with different levels of cocoa and decaf options.

Whatever the trend, the office drinks market has an option to meet it. That's good news on the one hand, but of course it also makes choosing the right solution for your staff and organisation – on budget – somewhat trickier.

Narrowing your options

Having thought through the essentials, you can now start to pin down the practical details. For example:

1. Where are you planning to locate the equipment?
2. How many machines are you looking for?
3. Will there be access to mains water or will machines need to be filled manually?
4. Do you want to provide specific drinks and snacks?
5. Will drinks be free or paid for?
6. If paid for, what payment system would you prefer?
7. Do you have specific requirements to meet your company's corporate social responsibility commitments?
8. Do you require finance, or will you be buying your equipment outright?

Once you have an idea of your requirements, you're then in a great position to start looking for a supplier that's up to the job!



Comparing suppliers

It's worth choosing your supplier carefully, as you are often committed for the medium term. Many agreements are for three to five years, so you need to be sure that your machines and the service on offer will be just as good in year five as they are on day one. So, what should you be looking out for?

You are likely to buy your drinks supplies from the supplier of your machines. You need to think about ordering and delivery.. Do they have an online shop? Do they offer next-day delivery?

What about quality? It's all very well having a top-of-the-range, brand new piece of kit but the fresh beans and other consumables are also key to drinks quality. Can your chosen supplier offer a good range and high quality products? Above all, will the coffee be freshly roasted? And what about cleaning? Do you require a daily or weekly hygiene service? How will your machines be maintained?

You are likely to be signed up to a drinks machine supplier for some years, so it's vital you think beyond the immediate installation. It's always worth adding a breakdown or maintenance contract. You won't want a machine out of action for days on end.

Some suppliers offer the works – they will manage your machine, consumables stock, and scheduled maintenance for you.

Is your potential supplier any good?

As experienced suppliers of good quality office drinks equipment, consumables and related services, we think the following points are the most important.

It's the supplier's job to get to know your company's culture, infrastructure and expectations, so that they can advise on the solutions that will meet your needs well. We often find it's best to do this face-to-face. We appreciate you are busy, but a quick meeting at the start of the process can often save a lot of time further down the line.

Suppliers can generally offer a range of equipment, but are they really an expert in the equipment that interests you?

Does your chosen supplier offer the services you require? Good quality suppliers generally insist on some form of equipment maintenance agreement to ensure your drinks machines are kept in good working order, contributing to the smooth running of your office.

When comparing costs, we have already explained that there are big differences between different options – such as instant compared with freshly ground coffee.

So make sure you know what you're looking for before you compare costs. Otherwise, you could find yourself comparing chalk with cheese.

Check your supplier's claims before you sign on the dotted line.

1. Go online to view customer feedback. For example, Roast & Ground has an online shop where you can view all our live customer feedback.
2. Ask to see testimonials and enquire how long the supplier tends to keep their customers for.
3. Consider trials, demos or even a tasting session.
4. Ask about the company's background and check how long they have been trading for.
5. Research the machine manufacturer.
6. Check whether the equipment you are considering to install can be repaired by the supplier's own engineers – and that they are specifically trained to look after it.



Always check the small print of any contract – transparency from the very start builds trust. There's no point choosing a supplier with restrictive practices. They give the industry a bad name, at a time when businesses are operating in a volatile, ever-changing environment.

Of course you want to make sure you are getting great value. But if the price is too cheap you may not be paying sufficient to get the service your business requires.

Last but not least, it is a good idea to meet with your potential supplier, to see if you get a good feeling about them. Do they act with integrity, have they taken the time to understand your needs and do you feel they have your best interests at heart? Is this a supplier you feel you can trust to look after you well for the next three years and more?

If you've taken on board the checklists, gone through the detail and you still have a choice to make, then trust your judgment on who your suppliers are.



Conclusion

A company's facilities tend to reflect the culture of the organisation, so choosing the right supplier is really important. It says a lot about the company and how it treats its staff.

It is challenging to find the right drinks machines for your office spaces, but there are suppliers out there who are more than willing to help you find the right solutions.

Whether yours is a smaller office, with 100 staff, or a company with thousands of employees scattered across the UK, Roast & Ground can offer you the expertise, passion for the industry and track record for delivering high quality products and services that are just what you need.





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