



A Restaurant Operator's Guide for Selecting a Specialty Fabrication Partner





If your kitchen runs like a well-oiled machine, congratulations. Read no further. But most kitchens, especially those in quick serve and fast casual segment, don't work that way. Instead, in busy times, they can be a blur of activity and disorder that reduces throughput, efficiency and even profitability.

To combat this, operators over the years have turned to Specialty Fabrication companies to help make more effective use of their foodservice equipment, processes and space. For restaurants looking for fabricators, here are some key points to consider.

More Than a Metal Bender

Many companies are able to shape steel into correctly fitted equipment, but in today's challenging restaurant environment, you need a company that does more than just bend metal. You need a supplier that will spend time analyzing the current kitchen and operations with in-depth research of your food prep areas. Ask them this question: How will you learn our business, become familiar with our operation and understand our needs? An effective fabricator will develop ideas based on their observations of your kitchen and your menus so they can bring new solutions to the table. You want a dealer and fabricator who will partner with you.

Work a Shift

Is your fabricator willing to man a shift or two to see how your kitchen works and experience the bottlenecks first-hand? Recent observations in one quick serve kitchen revealed too many tasks that had employees crossing each other's paths. There was no orderly flow, just assembly points that employees had to walk between and maneuver around. That much movement stifled throughput, and working a shift brought it to light, making the fabricator part of the process instead of just observing.

Follow the Menu

A fabricator should follow your menu to learn how a new layout or equipment design might help limit unnecessary employee movement. They should also understand how crewmembers react in their current situation and how their performance could be enhanced with ergonomically engineered equipment solutions.

Observations Become Ideas

Ideation is where a company puts what they learned onto paper. This typically will produce a two-part plan: The first step is to relocate tasks within food prep areas to create a more efficient kitchen layout. This would be followed by equipment redesigns to support that layout. A supplier can help make a restaurant excel through innovative use of vertical and horizontal space such as having the product stored below the counter, then assembled on the counter with packaging above the counter. In this scenario, the employee stays in one location, using one piece of equipment and providing a big boost in efficiency.

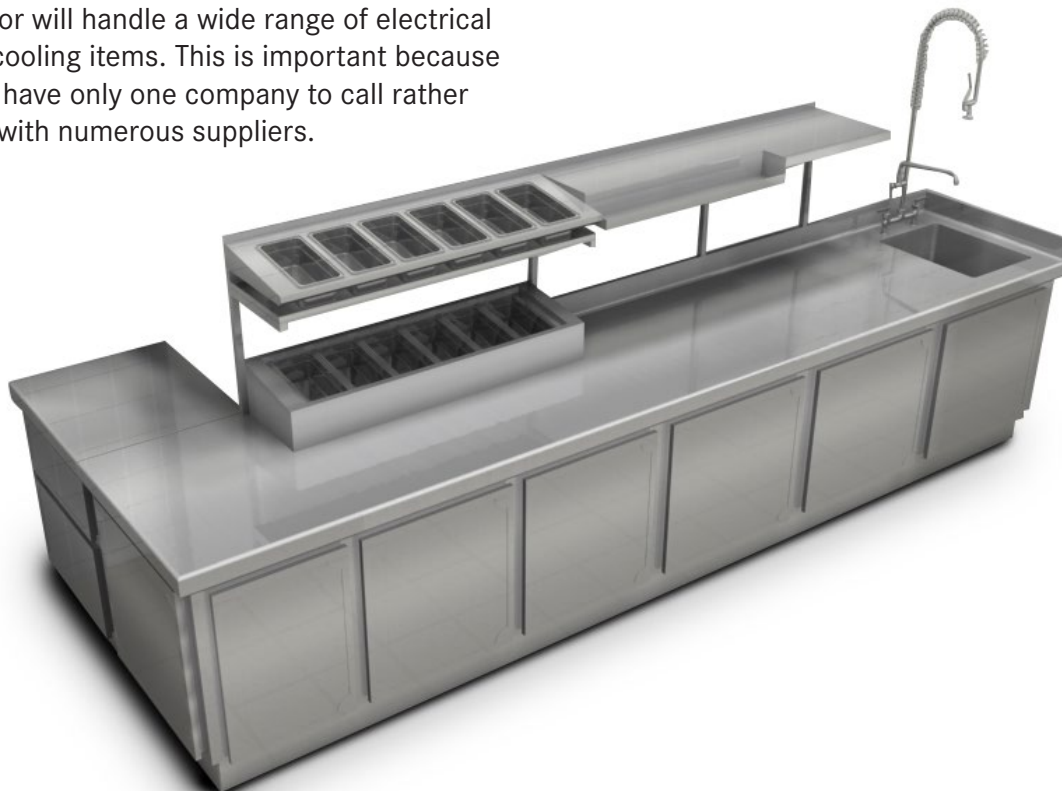


The 80 Percent Rule

A fabricator should be able to formulate solutions based on the restaurant's menu. For example, if 80 percent of your products involve just a few items, consider placing all them in one cell to minimize crew steps. The 20 percent may require a little extra movement, but if you're finding new efficiencies in the 80 percent, then you're experiencing significant gains in kitchen productivity.

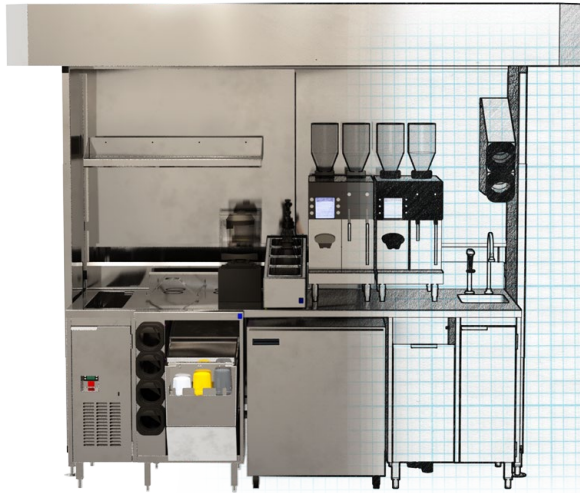
More Than Static Fab

Some suppliers focus on static fabrication such as tables and cabinets. However, you may want a company that offers a total solution, including items like built-in refrigeration, cold rails for handling condiments or hot holding drawers and warmers. The ideal fabricator will handle a wide range of electrical heating and cooling items. This is important because it means you have only one company to call rather than dealing with numerous suppliers.



Global Support

As technology shrinks our world, dealing with a Specialty Fabricator that operates worldwide has never been more important. Do they know regulatory requirements in areas such as Europe, South American and Asia? Are they familiar with different cultures and the nuances of doing business in places like China and Thailand? Do they have manufacturing and warehouse facilities in countries overseas? Are their engineering, sales and manufacturing platforms identical in all locations and easily transportable? While your restaurant may be domestic, you may eventually want to branch out internationally. Your Specialty Fabricator should be as strong globally as they are in the U.S.



After the Sale

If your fabricator is reshaping or developing new equipment for your food areas, how will they support it after installation? Is there one convenient number to call for all your equipment questions and concerns? Are they available 24/7, 365 days a year? These are key questions to ask upfront because even new equipment eventually wears out or needs to be replaced.

Know Your Assets

In a busy restaurant where the focus is on customers, employees and production, it's no surprise that managers might not know the specifics of every piece of equipment. This is where asset tracking can play a major role. Does your fabricator have a database that keeps track by store of equipment purchase dates and serial numbers? This can be important especially when it comes to making changes like adding a menu item or changing out equipment.

Manage the Details

This benefit helps restaurants focus on improving their operation without worrying if purchase orders are issued in a timely manner or that the invoices are being paid. It's another way to help operators make their restaurant more efficient.

Online Information

Does your fabricator offer online tools that let you instantly check orders, review service tickets and track service history? It's a value added benefit that puts information at the operator's fingertips.

Specialty Fabrication & Franke

As a Specialty Fabricator, Franke Foodservice Systems offers a complete solution through a network of foodservice dealers. "We can do everything in-house, everything a restaurant is looking for in a fabricator," says Mark Allegra, Franke's Director of Key Account Engineering.

Global operations in 37 countries on four continents as well as a 24/7 365 Call Center for technical and sales support help set Franke apart from competitors. But just as important to an operator seeking a fabricator is the company's commitment to learning how your restaurant works - understanding the menu, the specific food requirements and the various crewmember tasks. "In-depth research lets us "tailor-fit" food prep solutions to meet your needs," Allegra explains.

He recalls recent work with a fast casual chain. "We had heard how employees were running all over, grabbing lettuce and tomatoes from this station and that station. It was a pretty chaotic operation. So we sat there for a few days observing how things worked, how crewmembers reacted to orders. We took the information back home and engineered a piece of equipment that eliminated all that crew travel."



