

Advantages of Manual vs. Vending Food Service

Generally there are two different ways to approach food service for your college or business – Vending or Manual.

Although there are obvious differences between the two types of service, when deciding which is best for your college or business, consider the following:

Vending

Vending is fully automated. It is open for business 24/7. It is the easiest food service method for you, and takes the least amount of time, space and utilities. Many vending companies now offer healthy products to supplement the standard snacks and beverages. Many also take credit/debit cards as well as cash.

Vending machines can be located in various convenient places throughout your facility. Depending on the size of your facility it is reasonable to expect a commission from the vending operation. You should plan on your utility costs increasing if you offer vending machines.

A disadvantage to vending is the unfriendly exchange with the customer since there is no personal interaction. Personal requests cannot happen with a vending machine, so those with special needs are often left out. If there is a problem there is not a quick or easy way to resolve the issue for the customer. There is sometimes a perception of dated product in vending machines, although reputable vendors usually are good at rotating their product. There is also a lack of variety of choices as most items offered in the machine are the same week after week.

Manual (Conventional) Food Service

On-site manual food service is one in which the food is prepared and served on-site by real people! This requires a kitchen and select equipment. It also requires a serving line with the proper equipment for displaying and serving food.

The advantage of a manual food service is fresh food prepared in small batches or as ordered to provide the best tasting, most nutritious, and attractive looking product. Generally the closer to the time food is eaten the better it tastes. A manual food service offers more variety and customized service. If a person has special dietary needs, manual food service can accommodate those needs or work with the customer to find an acceptable alternative.

Customer service is an advantage of manual food service. There is personal interaction when listening to what a customer wants. There can also be brief discussions regarding other things important to the customer which is perceived as added value. If an issue arises, having a person present enables the customer to voice the issue and have satisfaction that someone cares and will do what is possible to resolve the problem. Most college and business leaders feel having manual food service improves productivity and retention of students or employees. It also is a convenience. Surveys of customers consistently show convenience as the number one reason why a person eats in an on-site food service facility. Often the number two reason is friendliness of the food service workers. Depending on the size and number of potential customers for the food service it is possible to expect a commission on the food operation. Note that small venues with fewer food service customers may have to subsidize their manual food service.

Disadvantages of an on-site manual food service include the cost of having a kitchen and serving area. In addition to the space and equipment costs, there are additional utility costs. There is more trash created with a manual food service, and thus the cost for removal is increased over vending service. The hours of operation are often limited although in some environments 24/7 service is possible. More labor is required to operate manual food service, but if a food service contractor is chosen this becomes their issue. Maintenance and repair of kitchen equipment is also a cost that must be considered. Insurance costs will be higher when there is a kitchen on-site.

Vending and Manual United

Many food service locations marry vending and manual service to provide their employees or students with the advantages of both. If contracting out your food service it is possible to have two different companies operate the manual and vending. It is also possible to have one company provide both services.

The advantage of one company providing both is you have one person and contract to deal with. The advantage of contracting with two different companies is normally a company that provides both services is an expert at only one. Having two companies gives you the opportunity to have an expert at both vending and manual.