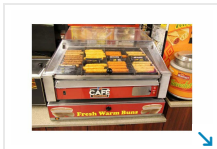




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Cutting Hot Food Energy Costs Can Boost C-Store Profits

Posted by Alissa Marchat | Date: January 11, 2018 | in: C-Store, Foodservice@Retail, Northeast | Leave a comment



High energy bills are a problem faced by c-store chains across the country, with 24-hour operations requiring constant lighting, heating, cooling and refrigeration. In the U.S., a typical convenience store uses an average of 52.5 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity per s.f. each year. Compared to other commercial spaces, this is three times the average, with 24-hour locations utilizing up to 7 times the energy. Add to this the steady increases in electricity rates and peak demand charges, and convenience store owner/operators are increasingly seeking out new ways to reduce daily energy usage, says [Creative Serving](#), a Union, New Jersey-based manufacturer of retail countertop foodservice equipment.

Although most of this focus has centered on refrigeration and lighting, one potential area for significant energy savings is often overlooked: roller grills, heated merchandisers and soup warmers that make up the “hot food” section now in most stores. Inefficient or aging equipment often draws unnecessary electricity, warms food unevenly and can increase food waste.

As such, store owners and operators are making more careful decisions when upgrading equipment, including turning to more efficient “green” models. These units are designed to deliver up to a 20 percent reduction in energy savings, which equates to hundreds of dollars per unit each year in electric costs.

“Convenience stores often run their roller grills and heated merchandisers all day and night, so the more energy efficient the heating, the lower the operating cost and higher the profit,” says Gerard Mahoney, senior manager of branded products at [Nathan’s Famous Inc.](#), hot dog brand franchiser.

Lost heat = lost profit

Traditional roller grills run heating elements through about 8-15 hollow rollers (on which cylinder shaped food is heated, held and served). The problem is that heated air continuously escapes from both sides of the hollow rollers. This requires higher wattage heating elements—turned on more often—to maintain the temperatures needed for food safety.

In contrast, the most energy efficient grills today seal the ends of the hollow rollers. This prevents the heated air from escaping and allows the use of lower-wattage heating elements, saving up to 20 percent in energy costs.

“The less heated air that escapes from the ends of the rollers, the less often the heating elements have to turn on, and the lower the required wattage,” says Mahoney. “That’s one of the reasons we turned to the energy efficient, sealed roller design of Creative Serving.”

Creative Serving says it utilizes heating elements with significantly lower wattage requirements than the industry norm.

“For retailers with tight margins, saving a few hundred dollars a year in operating costs due to energy savings can be like found money in their pocket,” says Mahoney.

Improved roller grill design addresses another vital issue as well. The large amount of heat escaping the ends of open rollers can cause heat variances of up to 50 degrees Fahrenheit in traditional roller grills. In contrast, roller grills with sealed ends can reduce these variances to less than 20 degrees and distribute heat more evenly.

“If you have a lot of heat variance in a roller grill, it can cause the product to over or undercook, to burn or fail to meet safety standards,” says Mahoney. “The roller grills with the sealed ends, however, provide a much more consistent temperature. This minimizes food waste and improves food safety.”

More efficient heated merchandisers

To keep foods hot and ready to serve, heated merchandisers present these foods at the counter in displays of various sizes. In this category as well, there are a number of ways to substantially lower operating cost by enhancing energy efficiency.

Unlike open air merchandisers that heat food placed directly on an aluminum hot plate, one of the most energy efficient strategies is to use radiant heating in the shelves of an enclosed display that conserves the heat.



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Creative Serving says its Infinity Series of heated merchandisers uses this approach, while incorporating a stainless steel exterior and serving area. To achieve this, aluminum is sandwiched between the stainless steel surface and the heating element. This takes advantage of aluminum's heat transfer properties and stainless steel's longevity, cleanability and finish, the company says.

Another energy efficient strategy involves using mirrored rear doors. These reflect heat back into the serving area, yet allow behind-the-counter staff to prepare, place and store food items for customers to "grab and go" as needed. This approach enhances energy savings, hold times and product display.

When counter space is limited, compact heated merchandisers can be deployed. However, traditional units can be underpowered in terms of heating.

"In terms of heated merchandisers, the smallest countertop models sometimes offer just static heat with one heating element and a light bulb," says Mahoney.

"When Mahoney oversaw the development of a new Nathan's Famous pretzel dog product for convenience stores, he turned to Creative Serving's Mini, a 12-inch wide, three-shelf, heated merchandiser that can reach temperatures up to 180°F," says the company.

To conserve energy, the unit's convection heating system circulates air through small holes in the shelves.

Creative Serving's merchandisers also give c-store operators the ability to easily place and remove magnetic signs, provided by vendors, on the unit's front.

"Any c-store or vendor using roller grills or heated merchandisers will be surprised at how energy efficient and easy to use they are becoming," says Mahoney. "When food service is not the only profit and loss category they are responsible for, that is important."

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About The Author

Alissa Marchat

A word nerd, grocery geek and two-year member of The Shelby Report. She is a proud new homeowner and a great lover of avocado toast.



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