

FROM THE ARCHIVES: The value of quality equipment

Understanding the difference between price and cost.

The decision to purchase new food packaging equipment or to upgrade an existing machine is usually determined by four of five things: Production demands have increased and your existing systems are inadequate to keep up; your existing equipment is becoming undependable and/or approaching end of life; you have added new and different products with changing requirements and your existing solutions are no longer adequate; you are moving from labor-intensive hand packaging toward a more automated solution; or you are embarking on a new business and you need to make your initial packaging machinery purchases.

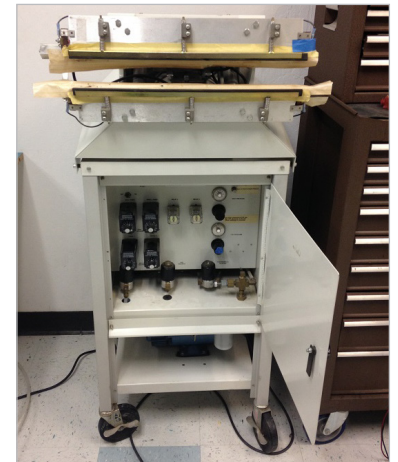
Regardless of why you're exploring the purchase of new packaging equipment, you should carefully consider the total cost of ownership (TCO) before making any decisions. The critical thinking that takes place before making the purchase decision is essential. A wise purchase decision now can pay dividends for years to come.

Determine The "True" TCO

The initial purchase and installation of your packaging system can be a significant part of your overall investment, but it's not the only cost. A machine that is difficult to operate, requires frequent repairs or is not adaptable to a dynamic production environment, can rob you of profits over time. Your goal should not be to purchase the cheapest packaging system that can do the job. Instead, try to view the purchase as a long-term investment, and predict how the purchase will affect your business goals both immediately and over several years. Be prudent - ask yourself the following questions before committing to any piece of capital equipment. Is the system built to last? What are the maintenance requirements? How available is technical support, and are the service professionals adequately trained to keep your system up and running? Are spare parts readily available? Does the equipment carry a favorable warranty? Will the machine or technology soon become obsolete? Can the machine be upgraded to match your changing needs? Two key considerations are the availability of good technical support and the costs involved in adequate employee training.

Employee training — Consider and plan for the ongoing cost of training packaging machine operators and maintenance personnel. High employee turnover is inherent in the food industry and is often the root cause of mistakes being made. For example, the cost of recalling a product due to a failed seal (resulting from an inadequately trained machine operator) can both impact profits and damage your brand. Once customers experience a seal failure, you cannot undo it or explain it away; the damage is done and your brand has been tarnished. Look for packaging equipment that can be mastered easily, safe to operate and uncomplicated to maintain. Doing this can help reduce the cost of training as well as help improve productivity and maintain quality over time. Plus safe, easy to use machines can reduce the cost of operator injury.

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Above is a Model PV Vacuum Sealer, that with occasional maintenance, and minor repairs has remained in service since 1990. Even though this machine was manufactured before solid state technology was common, we continue to stock virtually every component needed to keep it running for another decade.

Ensure Technical Support Is Readily Available — There are few things worse than buying a machine, not having it work properly, and then being unable to get the level of technical support needed to fix the problem. Ask if your supplier or integrator offers more than rudimentary technical support. Sometimes you have the capacity to order and replace consumable parts, make minor repairs, and accomplish upgrades in-house. For something more complex, make sure you have access to a professional support organization that will respond quickly and keep your down time to a minimum.

The most common barriers to adequate product support are language or distance, and often, both. You may find that a local company might be more willing and able to provide the necessary technical support. The ideal situation is to purchase from an equipment distributor that services what they sell, even if that may mean paying a bit extra. Good technical support includes a deeper understanding of the system that goes well beyond its installation. This may include validation procedures for medical baggers, detailed preventative maintenance, or other procedures that may be required for regulatory requirements. Good support needs to be accessible. Waiting hours can be a major inconvenience, but waiting days or weeks could cost you an unimaginable amount in lost revenue.

When it comes to packaging food: think clean

With a focus on the safe and sanitary processing of food, packaging equipment featuring stainless steel construction is a logical choice. But material choices are not the only consideration. You want to look for a design that is hygienic and reduces or eliminates the need for disassembly in order to maintain sanitary conditions. If the equipment must be disassembled, it should be accomplished quickly and preferably requiring few or no tools. Wet or dry, food processing can be a dirty business, and routine cleaning a fact of life. Organic matter can find its way into the smallest seams and cavities where it can collect and grow colonies of pathogens. Proper cleaning is a chore that is time-consuming; cleanup is sometimes wet, and almost always messy, which is why it is often not completed properly or on schedule. Investing in an easy-to-clean design – whether in stainless steel or painted finish, will more than pay for any premium cost over time.

Regulatory mandates will continue to impact the food industry – even for the subset of food packaging. The FDA Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points (HACCP) is an effective and rational means of assuring food safety from harvest to consumption, and packaging is a vulnerable step in the process. Preventing problems from occurring is the paramount goal underlying any HACCP system. It defines appropriate steps that may be taken to ensure that potentially contaminated food products do not reach the consumer.

Understand your requirements and weigh your options

When planning for the optimal food production ecosystem, be aware that it may take more than one piece of packaging equipment to adequately provide the increased production and output you are seeking. Be open to weighing all of your options. Consider the questions regarding total cost of ownership. This, in all likelihood, will render the cost of a system more manageable and provide more comfort with your purchase.



Designed for years of dependable service, The Audion 555 is a continuous vertical band sealer for packages that need to be sealed standing up. The 555 will accommodate a wide variety of bag sizes and is available with an optional conveyor.

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We invite your comments

You may contact us any time with comments, questions or topics for discussion. Our objective is to offer the latest information available on the subject of flexible packaging solutions.

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