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Consider them as part of your purchase decision, not an afterthought—and read the fine print.

Purchasing foodservice equipment is like buying a new car. It's an expensive investment that needs protection and maintenance. But by the point in the purchase when the dealer or manufacturers' rep reviews the warranty with you, your eyes are glazing over. After all, it's a new piece of equipment. What could happen, right? Knowing what the warranty covers—and doesn't cover—for what period of time, and under what conditions is important.

The Value Of A Warranty

Warranties accomplish several goals. First and foremost, they protect your investment in equip-

ment by replacing or fixing defective products for a certain period of time, usually two or three years. Equipment manufacturers in some categories are beginning to extend the warranty period to five years on certain components.

"More than just coverage, a warranty is evidence of the manufacturer's confidence in the products it makes as well as its commitment to the operators that purchase its brand," says a countertop equipment maker.

A warranty also is part of the value of the equipment. Your purchase decision is based on a number of factors, including performance, energy efficiency, how much it will improve productivity, life cycle cost and price, among others. The warranty should be part of this evaluation. A piece of equipment with a low up-front cost that has inferior warranty protection doesn't provide as much value as a reputable brand with a better warranty.

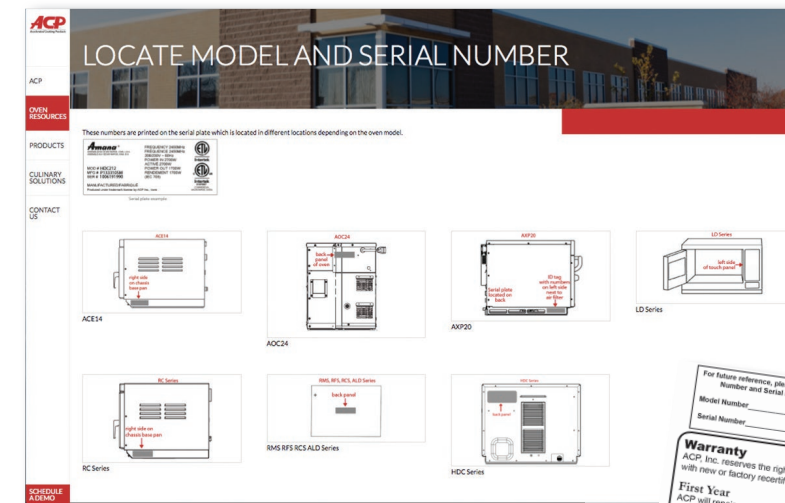
Like price, warranties can be negotiated. "A large chain might get a seven-year warranty on a fryer, or a 10-year, or even a lifetime warranty on a fry pot," says John Schwindt, General Manager, V.P. of Operations, Hawkins Commercial Appliance, Englewood, Colo., and current President of CFESA.

Train employees to use and maintain equipment properly. It starts with managers reading and following instructions in the manual. Courtesy of Convotherm.

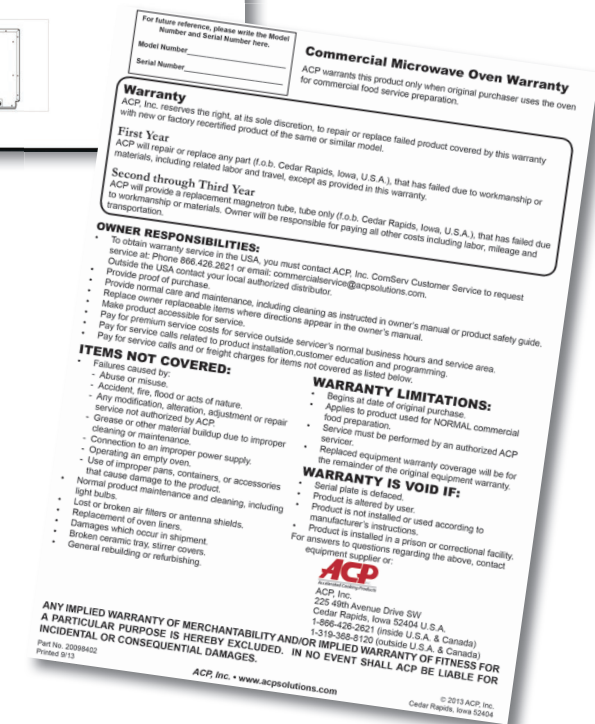
"Schools might get double the normal warranty on a fryer because they don't use them as much as fast-food operators. A warranty on any equipment that uses water, like steamers or combi ovens, can double if customers use a certain water filter."

When The Clock Starts

As with consumer products, many equipment manufacturers want customers to get full use of a warranty if needed, so they consider the purchase date the start of the warranty period.



Manufacturers work to make equipment model and serial numbers easy to find (l.). Record the details on the warranty certificate and operating manual. Below: Read warranty information before buying equipment to find out what's covered. Courtesy of ACP.



That's why it's important to keep the invoice, purchase receipt or bill of sale. But what happens if the proof of purchase goes missing?

"There's usually a gap between when the product is shipped and when it actually goes into service," says a dishmachine manufacturer. "We genuinely want the operator to get the full warranty they paid for, but if we don't know when the product is installed the only date we have to go off of is the ship date."

"We use ship date plus 90 days as the initial warranty start date," says an ice machine maker. "A default is set in the system when equipment ships from our factory. That's the official warranty start date unless other information is provided."

Warranty start date is a negotiable item that could be critical. "We installed equipment in the Denver airport and did start-up checks on all of it a year before the airport opened," Schwindt says. "Stadium projects often are like that, too, so manufacturers agree to start the warranty when operators get a certificate of occupancy."

It Pays To Register

One of the best ways to lock down a warranty start date, with or without an invoice or sales receipt, is to register equipment. "Always register a product with the manufacturer so that the

Right at the top of the list of **what isn't covered** by most warranties is damage caused by **hooking up equipment incorrectly**.



“A **warranty** on any equipment that uses water, like steamers or combi ovens, **can double** if customers use a certain water filter.”

— John Schwindt, Hawkins Commercial Appliance

warranty period is accurate,” says Lyndsi Petitti, Communication and Technology Facilitator at Gary’s East Coast Service, Shelton, Conn. “Otherwise, the period may be registered from when the dealer purchased the product.”

Many manufacturers make product registration easy with online forms, and that has a number of added benefits. To begin with, you’ll get faster service when all product information—model and serial number, registration date, location of installation, etc.—is already in the manufacturer’s system.

Moreover, by having your registration on file, manufacturers can log any warranty calls, track service provided under warranty and send out product

updates on such things as recalls, new suggested maintenance schedules, even software updates. While you may want to—and should—record all service calls, particularly during the war-

ranty period, having the manufacturer track that data is convenient, speeds service and warranty claims, and provides equipment makers with data they need to improve product quality.

What It Covers...

Typically, you’ll hear a manufacturers’ rep or see a spec sheet rattle off warranty coverage as two-year or three-year “P&L.” That means during the warranty period, the manufacturer will pay for parts and labor to repair defective equipment. But the length of a warranty period can vary widely from one category of equipment to another. Many dishmachines, for example, have only a 12-month warranty. Warranties on other equipment generally may be as long as five years, 10 years or even a lifetime on certain components.

The point of the warranty is to cover the cost of defects in material or workmanship on the part of the manufacturer. Often, however, there are some limitations, and it pays to find out what these are upfront. The manufacturer may exclude some part or motor from the general warranty, or change the terms. For example, many reach-in refrigerator manufacturers offer a three-year parts-and-labor warranty, but add an additional two years on the compressor.

The warranty also should spell out whether it includes on-site service and/or replacement warranty options. On-site service is usually a given for large pieces of equipment, but these terms are especially important when it comes to countertop equipment. A less desirable warranty will make you ship defective equipment back to the manufacturer or authorized service center for repair or replacement, at owner’s expense.

...And What It Doesn’t

As importantly, warranties should clearly spell out what isn’t covered, and you should be aware of those exclusions *before* installing the equipment. Here’s why:



Consider an extended warranty on equipment such as flight-type dishmachines or other high-ticket items that need to remain up and running for 15-plus years. *Courtesy of Hobart.*

TILT! GAME OVER

The fastest ways to void a warranty on equipment are improper installation, using the equipment for purposes it wasn’t intended for and using unauthorized service agents to fix problems. Always make sure you:

- 1 Use certified installers and install equipment according to manufacturer specifications;
- 2 Read the operating manual and train employees to use the equipment correctly; and
- 3 Use only authorized service reps to service the equipment—authorized usually means “factory trained.”

When you have a problem, check the troubleshooting guide first; one of the top causes of equipment not working is it hasn’t been plugged in.

- **Improper installation.** Right at the top of the list of what isn’t covered by most warranties is damage caused by hooking up equipment incorrectly. That can include using an unauthorized or unlicensed installer, using the wrong electrical service, improper water supply and inadequate gas pressure, to name a few.
- **Improper usage.** This varies by product, but with a little common sense you can probably figure it out. One example: Don’t let employees use open oven doors as a step stool to reach the grease filters in the exhaust hood. Make sure managers read and follow instructions in the operating manual and train employees to use and maintain equipment properly.
- **Unauthorized service.** In most cases, only an authorized factory service rep can perform warranty service. Once the warranty period is over, anyone can service the equipment, but not before.
- **Ownership transfer.** If your operation changes ownership during the warranty period you may not be able to get equipment serviced

under the warranty, unless it was transferred as well. That usually requires paperwork and sometimes a fee.

While all these actions technically will void a warranty, denial of warranty service isn’t automatic, depending on circumstances. “Many manufacturers don’t void warranties,” says Schwindt. “Instead, they work to get issues resolved to keep the customer happy.”

Read The Fine Print

Although manufacturers in any equipment category try to offer competitive warranties as well as competitive product, a warranty may be the one item on your spec list that tips the balance in favor of one maker over another. Read warranty information before buying equipment to find out what’s covered and what isn’t.

Some helpful hints:

- Keep the warranty certificate in a binder with the operating manual and service and maintenance records.
- Read the warranty carefully and train employees who use equipment the proper dos and don’ts that will ensure you get warranty

service if the equipment fails.

- Record the equipment model number and serial number prominently on both the warranty certificate and operating manual. Model/serial number plates are often located in difficult-to-read locations, though many manufacturers now are making them more accessible or including them in a QR code on an easy-to-see spot.
- Clean, maintain and service the equipment according to the manufacturer's instructions to ensure there's no violation of the warranty's terms.
- If the equipment doesn't operate correctly, use the troubleshooting guide first before calling the manufacturer or service agent. The problem may be as simple as plugging the unit in.
- Follow the warranty claim instructions to initiate service.

Extending The Warranty

Opinions are split on whether you should pay for an extended warranty. Most manufacturers don't offer them. They're typically an add-on service from the dealer or service agency. A lot depends on the equipment type. Such a service can make a lot of sense for, say, a \$100,000 flight-type dishmachine that you need to keep operational for 15 years or more.

Often, a better option than paying for an extended warranty is paying a reputable service agency for a planned maintenance program that will keep equipment in peak operating condition. For big-investment equipment like HVAC systems, kitchen exhaust systems, walk-ins and so forth, you may even want a combination of the two.

As with a manufacturer's warranty, make sure to read the fine print for an extended warranty or service program before signing. **fer**

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