



## EDUcatering – December 2013

### Feature: Catering Distributors

*Please attribute any quotes from this information to Ray Hall, Managing Director, RH Hall*

- ***What methods can caterers buy new catering equipment? E.g. online, catalogues***

Caterers can buy new equipment by a number of different methods – for example online, catalogues, or as with our company, through our nationwide network of over 1400 RH Hall approved distributors. We can also supply equipment direct via our dedicated national account and public sector divisions. We also have a creative and dynamic Foodservice Solutions division which provides bespoke and tailored equipment and menu solutions for any foodservice operational need.

We advocate that if possible, it best to see the equipment in the flesh to get the correct feel for build quality, functionality etc. Our distributors can help here in terms of showrooms and demonstrations. We also have a 3,000sq.ft. state of the art development kitchen facility at our Bedfordshire HQ which showcases a vast range of the equipment we offer from the leading brands we represent. We have hosted development chefs and clients here, where they can not only look at the equipment, but gain hands-on experience of how the pieces work and feel.

In times of austerity it is tempting to purchase from price driven mailers, but we would advise against doing this, and recommend only purchasing from known and reputable distributors and leading brands.

- ***How often should caterers change their catering equipment?***

This is very much dependent on the individual piece of equipment – its build quality, how regularly it is serviced and how well it is looked after. With the leading recognised brands, if they are maintained correctly they can literally last for years and years!

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However, we would recommend that caterers should always keep a look out for new items of kit that will complement and enhance their menu and operation and also to be aware of 'green' and innovative equipment that continues to evolve – this equipment could help them with savings on running costs and in turn pay for themselves many times over.

- **What essential catering equipment does a typical school kitchen require?**

The type of catering equipment a typical school requires is very much dependent on the size of operation, the covers and menu on offer. But generally, all kitchens require refrigeration, prime cooking and food preparation utensils. Equipment that is multi-functional and versatile is ideal and where space is at a premium, units with a small footprint can help save valuable space – as can units that can stack, one on top of the other.

Speed of service within a school is also a key consideration. An example of an extremely versatile piece of accelerated cooking equipment that operates from a small footprint, with a simple plug in and go arrangement is the Maestrowave Combi Chef 7 - this oven is able to operate in a veritable combination of modes – bake, roast, grill, steam, defrost, regenerate, microwave, boil or simply keep food warm – this oven can do it all and is extremely easy to use. It allows operators to produce quality results in super quick time.

- **What services should caterers expect from their equipment distributor?**

Caterers should expect at the very least, professional, independent advice, coupled with sound customer service and after sales back-up. However, there is a further level of expertise that caterers can benefit from and they would be wise to explore the full range of services that can be offered from the more well established, highly regarded and reputable distributors .

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RH Hall has a vast and extensive knowledge of the market and of foodservice equipment. We also have a nationwide network of approved distributors to offer advice and after sales care. However, our breadth of knowledge goes beyond the supply of products - we pride ourselves on understanding and anticipating the needs of our customers. We consult and advise both customers and food companies on how to get the optimum results from their food, menus and equipment - we are innovators and provide total foodservice solutions that meet clients' needs perfectly. We can even adapt standard foodservice equipment, tailoring it technically and cosmetically to suit the clients' needs. We have our own fabrications business so we can also offer bespoke products from scratch, which is quite a unique position for a distributor.

- **Should caterers only expect to use one distributor?**

If they select carefully, then a caterer can use one distributor – but it will need to be one that carries a large and comprehensive range of equipment and one that can advise on the equipment and overall project; manage the installation and then provide a complete after sales support in terms of servicing and spare parts. RH Hall's product ranges consists of over 10,000 items of equipment from over 100 leading foodservice brands and bespoke products form our own UK based fabrications factory, this coupled with our dedicated foodservice solutions division means that anything from a toaster to a complete kitchen can be specified, installed and serviced through us and our nationwide support network – we can literally provide a one-stop solution.

There are benefits also to using the one distributor i.e. a relationship and understanding will be built up between the two and that distributor should then be in a position to fully understand and anticipate the operational needs of the caterer and the organisation and give more informed advice accordingly.



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- **Do you have any top tips for selecting the right catering equipment distributor?**

It is best to choose a company that is well established, reputable and one that can give independent, professional and unbiased advice. Also one that operates to acknowledged standards e.g. ISO accredited. Also with regards to purchasing within the education sector, caterers can be sure of their supplier's credentials through the ESPO buying agreement – RH Hall is an ESPO accredited supplier. All the financials, pricing, service have already been checked out at the tender stage, so caterers in the sector can buy with even greater confidence.

Caterers should check out the full range of products and services a distributor can offer and the level of after sales service and availability of spares and technical support. Also be sure to see that there are no hidden extras – that the terms of supply are transparent.

- **Please include any other comments that you feel our readers will be interested in.**

We always advocate that a caterer should select the best products they can afford and in these challenging times it's no different. Many cheaper imports are flooding into the UK and it can be tempting to go down this route, but unknowingly to many, a lot of this equipment doesn't have any product conformity standards. As a catering equipment distributor we insist on this and urge caterers to do so too. In fact, our investment into the integrity of our products runs into tens of thousands of pounds a year – but we don't pass these onto our customers, we absorb this additional operational cost into our business – we believe it has to be a given – we want to ensure we offer the best and safest products possible.

To help ensure we keep at abreast of industry trends and maintain our position at the forefront of product innovation, we work in partnership with a number of major food companies and suppliers. We also support a number of professional bodies including the Craft Guild of Chefs, Microwave Technologies Association, FCSI, CESA, to name a few.

Our state of the art development kitchen has played host to many industry events and the centre is open to all within the industry - any caterers interested in using the facility can contact our sales team on 01296 663400.



- **Please include a definitive website address where readers can go for more info on your company.**

Please visit [www.rhall.com](http://www.rhall.com) for more information of our products and services.