



| By Lisa White |

## Self-Serve Beverage Designs Emphasize Efficiency

**Well-designed self-serve beverage stations can reduce labor and enhance the customer experience.**

With the ongoing labor shortage and customers seeking a more customized foodservice experience, it is no surprise that self-serve beverage stations have become more prevalent. Self-serve is win-win for operators and customers, says Arlene Spiegel, president, Arlene Spiegel & Associates, New York. "It's a winning and profitable use of square footage, but it's not a one-size-fits-all layout."

### Looking at Logistics

Not only is a self-serve beverage station's location in the venue important, so, too, are its adjacencies. "For example, in a corporate cafe with straight serving lines, we wouldn't put a self-serve beverage station in the middle of a traffic pattern or queue, Spiegel notes. "Ideally, whether in a c-store, corporate cafe or quick-service operation, we want to put these stations away from the main counter and traffic flow." "The first thing [to consider] is separation, as logistically all of the condiments and self-serve finishing areas are already away from the main line for service." In other words, "get it out of the way!"

### The Equipment Lineup

Along with the equipment layout, operators should consider clear and identifiable signage, including wayfinding. "You want everyone to know the contents of each container and dispenser. So, it's important to label everything and make sure it's in the correct size and shape containers to avoid confusion and excess waste," Spiegel says. "Since COVID, we're not seeing pourers and shakers as much as single-serve packets or containers."

Volume and demand will determine how long and deep the single-serve beverage stations need to be. Timing, too, is a factor, "If someone needs hot water for instant coffee or hot chocolate, this will take 30 to 40 seconds to produce. A single pour of coffee or soft drink will take 10 seconds, Spiegel says. "Depending on the number of people in line, an operator may need two or three dispensers of the most popular items.

Otherwise, it can create a bottleneck." Even more important, customers do not like waiting when they're in a hurry.

In addition to logistics and adjacencies, don't forget to assess the counter height. "If it's too low or too high, it will be awkward for customers," Spiegel says. "Best practices say counters should be 36 to 40 inches from the ground to the top. Also, from an equipment standpoint, we need to make sure everything is safe, as we don't want a risk of burns or spills."

### Design Dos

Typically, a beverage station should have a large enough capacity to handle the busiest shift. "If you're going through 300 cups, be sure to stock lids, java jackets, straws, stirrers, pc sugars, milk dispensers, and a countertop ice machine, so you don't have to replenish during peak times," Spiegel says. "If a full spectrum of menu items cannot be handled, then the menu should be more limited. You may not be able to offer six types of milk for coffee. She adds that menu engineering and the breadth of product has to do with customer demands and available space. In most cases, less is more. "Having premium products in a self-serve area should showcase the operation's brand standards, this is also a key marketing area," Spiegel says."

It's a place to market special deals, provide information on store hours, recruit future employees, or promote upcoming events." For this reason, she says operators should not overlook the potential for messaging.

### Newer Integrations

Self-serve beverage areas can benefit from technology through point-of-sale system integration. "Customers can swipe or tap a credit card or scan a QR code on their phone, to order a customized cup for fully automated self-serve," Spiegel says. "This technology is typically integrated with point-of-sale systems and third-party providers to automatically ring up, and capture orders on the back end." ●