



“Just Send Me Cuts”

Four common words that can lead to serious errors

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Manufacturers' cut or data sheets, available for most common foodservice equipment, are intended to serve as the basis for relaying information on dimensions, utility details, options, etc. Unfortunately, cut sheets are misused when they are treated as an end product rather than a part of a flow of information. Cut sheets should not be expected to serve as the sole source of information for utility service requirements, bidding equipment, or to convey information on how equipment is expected to operate.

Consulting engineers, contractors and project managers often request cut sheets from operators, consultants and dealers, thinking that with “cuts” and an equipment plan or layout they have all the information required to build a kitchen. Nothing could be further from the truth. A book of cuts and a floor plan without specifications are as valuable as a recipe that is missing cooking times, temperatures or quantities of ingredients. Cut sheets are not a substitute for specifications, although the meaning of the term is often confused. When an architect or engineer asks for equipment “specs” they usually mean cut sheets. Therefore, it is important to ask the person requesting the information what information is really required.

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Errors in providing information are compounded when the person or organization providing cuts mistakes a marketing brochure for a cut sheet. Manufacturers usually provide two different sets of information: a sales brochure (usually in color with photos) that is used to sell a product, and the equipment cut or data sheet. Some manufacturers combine sales and data sheets in one document. Usually the end result is a compromise of both objectives. It takes a trained eye to be able to distinguish between a good and bad cut sheet, in terms of the value of information provided. Often when cut books are prepared quickly by clerical or sales personnel, they

result in a mixture of sales and data brochures missing many details and critical information. Sometimes the cut sheets don't represent specific models, but are a generic “one-sheet-fits-all” approach that is almost useless to those who need detailed data.

When end users are presented with equipment information for consideration, they should be able to review what options are available up and down the range of products in the category of interest. By design, most cut sheets don't indicate different levels of capacity or choices, while sales

brochures usually present a wider range of models. Someone involved in planning a new facility or replacing equipment should request information on different brand and model options for each category so he or she is aware of what alternatives are available.

Even when a cut sheet has the complete information needed, it may be indecipherable. Some manufacturers print their data sheets in small typefaces or cram too much data on a page. For a good example, look at a cut sheet for a multi-tank dishwasher. Imagine reading a copy of that cut which was faxed to someone in the field or a branch office. Try to guess where the electrical connections are located and how many are required.

Sometimes vendors who take the time to prepare complete and well-organized cut sheets destroy the legibility by adding background screening or colors right over the most important data or information. When the cut sheet is photocopied or faxed, it becomes indecipherable. This concern has been addressed in industry publications for almost 30 years, yet about 25 percent of all new cut sheets are not faxable. Vendors should design their cut sheets to be readable after photocopying and faxing and be less concerned about Web sites or Internet-based information distribution. As volume purchasers of equipment and heavy users of cut sheets for submittals, foodservice equipment dealers should be in the forefront for

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demanding clean, readable cut sheets.

Even when cut sheets are readable, faxable and well-organized, they can be misleading and assume that the reader knows far more about equipment than should be reasonably expected. Only a few manufacturers include critical service and operating clearance dimensions on their cuts. No one should have to wait until equipment is unpacked and then have to read in an installation manual to find out their new oven needs 12 inches of clear space on one side when only 2 inches is available, yet this occurs all too regularly. Find one manufacturer that has a warning on its cut sheet not to locate a fryer closer than 16 inches from an appliance with an open gas flame. Yet, some vendors

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find space on their cut sheets for disclaimers on 40-gallon braising pans or 100-gallon steam kettles that state "Not for Household Use"—oh, really?

Cut sheets aren't always accurate or up-to-date. Most have the disclaimer "subject to change without notice" and sure enough they do change and without no-

notice. New methods of information distribution, including manufacturer's Web sites and AutoQuotes, the excellent and widely used CD-ROM-based estimating and pricing program, now include cut sheets for many manufacturers.

Earlier electronic catalogs like FirstPlace should have resolved concerns with accurate data, but their use and number of manufacturers included in them is unfortunately limited. Internet-based sites are challenging to anyone without DSL,

ISDN or other high-speed data lines. Often printing cut sheets from a Web site or even a CD-ROM is slower than copying manufacturers' catalog cuts with a photocopier.

Equipment cut sheets from ventilator, walk-in and refrigeration rack system vendors are of limited value in preparing utility drawings. For any engineered or custom system, utility information should be prepared from manufacturers' shop drawings or submittals developed specifically for that project, not from cut sheets. Average air flow data shown on some ventilator cuts can either exceed actual requirements or may even be inadequate.

Cut sheets aren't even available for some of the most important and costly items of equipment in a kitchen. How does someone convey configuration and utility requirements on a cut sheet for a 20-foot-long custom-fabricated chef's table that includes various warmers, sinks, refrigerators and other components? This information needs

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to be communicated through plans, elevations and written specifications. Multi-section walk-in coolers and freezers are another example where cut sheets provide little value.

You need to also be cautious of cut sheets of standard buyout equipment. For almost five years one of the largest range manufacturers did not include any electrical requirements on its cuts for convection oven-base gas ranges for the fan motor. Adding a 120-volt outlet behind an all-gas cooking line can be an expensive and disruptive exercise. Problems like these would not occur if manufacturers were more careful in preparing and checking their cut sheets.

Cut sheets correctly indicate only the utility connections for a specific piece of equipment and are not a substitute for rough-in drawings. With a few exceptions, there are no references to how they interface with other

equipment or building systems. Cut sheets don't indicate that a piece of equipment requires a grease trap, indirect waste, vacuum breaker or disconnect switch. This information is part of the utility connection drawings that should be prepared for any project by qualified kitchen professionals.

Cut sheets are misused as a substitute for detailed written specifications. Owners and general contractors issue a pack of cuts to dealers or installers and ask for a "bid". What they receive is a range of different prices based on the assumptions and interpretation the various bidders have made. Even if someone takes the time to check or circle options and accessories, their efforts are in vain. Far too many cut sheets have incomplete listings or data on options or accessories. Even when options are listed, rarely is there any information on what benefits they provide the end user. Sometimes two options conflict with each other and can't be used on the same product, yet this is rarely noted on the cut sheet.

When prepared with care and concern for the information they need to convey, manufacturers' cuts and data sheets are valuable resource tools. However, they should not be used as the primary source of information to bid or build a kitchen. Most manufacturers could serve the foodservice industry far better with a small amount of extra care in how they prepare their cuts. As users and purchasers, we all need to communicate our dissatisfaction with those manufacturers who aren't providing this information correctly. □

About The Author

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