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Machine Buying Guide





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Choosing the best commercial coffee machine for your business

When deciding on the right commercial coffee machine for your business, you'll want to make the right choice to meet your needs and avoid disappointment. Your coffee machine should create quality beverages, satisfy customers and ensure a seamless coffee experience. In this guide, we'll explore the different types of commercial coffee machines and discuss the essential things to consider when choosing the right machine for you.

TYPES OF COMMERCIAL COFFEE MACHINES

There are lots of different commercial coffee machines, ranging from bean-to-cup machines to traditional espresso machines and instant coffee machines - otherwise known as the classic coffee vending machine. We'll look at the advantages and disadvantages of each of these machines, allowing you to make an informed decision that's a good fit for you and your business.

Understanding everything that different commercial coffee machines can do means you can choose the perfect machine that helps meet your coffee goals. So, let's explore and discover the possibilities to enhance your coffee offerings and delight your customers.



Traditional ESPRESSO MACHINES

Traditional espresso machines are perfect for businesses with skilled baristas who can craft an array of espresso-based beverages.

ADVANTAGES

1. Exceptional coffee quality: Traditional espresso machines are renowned for producing high-quality coffee. They allow for precise control over various brewing settings, such as water temperature, pressure, and extraction time. All of this control results in rich, aromatic espresso shots with a robust flavour profile. The ability to finely tune these characteristics empowers baristas to create consistently excellent cups of coffee.

2. Versatility in beverage options: Traditional espresso machines offer versatility because you can craft a wide range of coffee-based beverages. These machines allow for more creativity and customisation, from classic espresso shots to lattes, cappuccinos, and macchiatos. And, with the addition of steam wands, baristas can texture milk to create velvety microfoam for coffee art, giving their customers a high-end experience.

3. Personalised customisation: Traditional espresso machines provide baristas and coffee enthusiasts with a high level of control to make the coffee they want. They can adjust grind size, tamping pressure, water flow rate and plenty of other extra features, allowing you to optimise extraction. All of this means customers can get the perfect coffee to suit their unique preferences.

4. Engaging coffee preparation: Traditional espresso machines create an engaging and interactive coffee preparation process. The theatre of manually grinding beans, tamping coffee and pulling the espresso shot adds to a coffee shop's overall experience and ambience. This engaging process can captivate customers, providing a memorable and enjoyable coffee-drinking experience. Plus, it can add a level of elegance to a quality coffee shop.

5. Aesthetic appeal: Traditional espresso machines often have clean designs, with polished metal surfaces and a retro feel. These machines can enhance the ambience and decor of coffee shops, creating an inviting and sophisticated atmosphere that aligns with speciality coffee culture.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Skill-dependent operation: Operating a traditional espresso machine requires a specific level of skill and expertise. Achieving excellent results demands proficiency in all areas of using the machine and creating great coffee. This higher skill requirement means proper training and experience is needed for baristas, leading to higher labour costs and potential challenges in finding qualified staff.

2. Time-consuming processes: Making espresso-based beverages using traditional machines is time-consuming, especially during busy periods when orders are stacking up. The preparation involves grinding coffee beans, tamping, pulling shots, and steaming milk, meaning customers have to wait longer with traditional espresso machines than with other brewing methods.

3. Higher maintenance and upkeep: Traditional espresso machines require meticulous regular maintenance to make sure they operate at the perfect performance for long periods of time. Cleaning tasks, such as backflushing, descaling, and group head maintenance, have to be performed frequently to avoid coffee residue buildup and equipment breakdowns. Additionally, periodic servicing and repairs can be needed, which can add to general running costs.

4. Equipment cost and complexity: Traditional espresso machines are more expensive to purchase and maintain than other coffee machines. They have intricate parts, including pumps, boilers and group heads, all which lead to a higher price tag. The complexity of the machines also requires specialised technical knowledge for troubleshooting and repairs.

5. Space and footprint: Traditional espresso machines tend to occupy more space than other alternatives. This can pose challenges for businesses with limited space available to them, particularly those operating in small cafes, food trucks or mobile coffee setups.

While traditional espresso machines offer exceptional coffee quality and customisation options, they come with some additional considerations. Things like skill requirements, maintenance needs and higher costs all add to the complexity of an espresso machine. It's important for businesses to carefully consider their needs, resources and target market to determine whether a traditional espresso machine is the right choice for their service.



Bean-to-cup

COFFEE MACHINES

Bean-to-cup machines offer a convenient and consistent coffee solution for businesses. These machines grind fresh coffee beans, brew the coffee, then dispense the final drink with minimal effort.

ADVANTAGES

1. Convenience and efficiency: Bean-to-cup machines automate the entire coffee-making process. This completely eliminates the need for separate grinders, tampers, or espresso machines. You can enjoy a freshly brewed cup of coffee within seconds, all with the push of a button.

2. Consistency in taste and quality: Bean-to-cup machines provide consistent results with each cup of coffee. The built-in grinder grinds the coffee beans to any desired coarseness, and the machine follows pre-programmed settings for brewing, resulting in a reliable taste profile that won't let you down.

3. Freshness: By grinding the coffee beans on demand, bean-to-cup machines maintain the freshness and aroma of the coffee. This enhances the coffee experience and allows customers to enjoy the authentic flavours of the beans.

4. Ease of use: These machines are user-friendly, meaning that staff and customers need minimal training. With intuitive interfaces and straightforward operation, almost anyone can use a bean-to-cup machine.

5. Versatility: Bean-to-cup machines can produce a variety of coffee-based beverages, including espresso shots, cappuccinos, lattes and more. Some models even offer hot water and steam options, allowing users to prepare tea or speciality drinks. Customers can get exactly what they want, meaning you can serve and please more people every day.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Limited customisation: Bean-to-cup machines often have fewer customisation options than traditional espresso machines. If you want to adjust settings like grind size, water temperature or extraction time, this can be difficult or restricted. This in turn limits your ability to fine-tune coffee for personal tastes and preferences.

2. Higher initial investment: Bean-to-cup machines cost more upfront, due to their integrated grinder and automation features. You'll need to weigh up your budget and long-term return on investment when choosing a bean-to-cup machine.

3. Maintenance and repair: While bean-to-cup machines simplify coffee-making, they require regular cleaning and maintenance to continuously provide high-quality coffee. It's essential to clean the grinder, milk frother and other parts of the machine to make sure there's no malfunctions or unpleasant build-up.

4. Complexity of repairs: If part of a bean-to-cup machine malfunctions, repairs may be more complex than with traditional espresso machines. Because bean-to-cup machines are entirely integrated, repairs usually require specialised technicians for servicing and fixes.

5. Limitations in speciality coffee: For businesses focusing on speciality coffee, controlling every element of the brew is often an important part of the process. Bean-to-cup machines don't offer the highest level of customisation, so speciality coffee enthusiasts might prefer a traditional espresso machine to give them full control of the brewing process.

Overall, bean-to-cup machines are a popular choice for businesses prioritising convenience, consistency and efficiency in delivering high-quality coffee to their customers.



Instant Vending COFFEE MACHINES

Instant coffee machines, or vending machines, provide a quick and hassle-free coffee solution. They offer a variety of drink options and are easy to use for the everyday coffee drinker.

ADVANTAGES

1. Speed and convenience: One of the main advantages of an instant coffee machine is its speed and convenience. Within seconds, users can have a cup of coffee ready to drink. This makes instant coffee machines ideal for environments where speedy service is essential, such as offices, self-service areas, or locations with high footfall.

2. Ease of use: Instant coffee machines are designed to be user-friendly, because they need minimal effort or skill to make a tasty coffee. They have simple interfaces with clearly marked buttons or touchscreen displays, making them accessible to users with all levels of coffee-based knowledge. This ease of use eliminates the need for extensive training or specialised barista skills.

3. Cost-effective: Instant coffee machines are generally more affordable than other commercial coffee machines. They have lower upfront costs and the required coffee ingredients, such as instant coffee granules or coffee capsules, are usually less expensive than freshly roasted coffee beans. This makes instant coffee machines an affordable option for businesses with budget constraints.

4. Minimal maintenance: Unlike traditional espresso machines or bean-to-cup machines, instant coffee machines typically require much less maintenance. They don't involve complex components like grinders or brewing units, which reduces the need for regular cleaning or servicing. This ease of maintenance saves time and effort for businesses, allowing them to focus on top quality customer service.

5. Wide range of beverage options: Instant coffee machines offer various options beyond just coffee. They can dispense hot chocolate, tea, flavoured drinks, and even speciality coffee-based beverages. This allows businesses to cater to different customer preferences and provide a more diverse menu of hot drinks.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Lower quality coffee: One of the main disadvantages of instant coffee machines is the lower quality of the coffee produced. The machines use instant coffee granules or powdered mixes, which often don't have the depth, aroma, and flavour complexity found in freshly ground coffee. This can be disappointing to customers who prefer premium-quality coffee.

2. Limited customisation: Instant coffee machines offer limited customisation options compared to other coffee machines. Users have less control over things like coffee strength, water temperature or milk-to-coffee ratio. This can result in a less personalised coffee experience, especially for people with very specific tastes.

3. Dependence on pre-packaged ingredients: Instant coffee machines rely on pre-packaged coffee ingredients, using capsules or powdered mixes. This limits the ability to experiment with different blends or freshly roasted coffee. Businesses that prioritise offering unique or speciality coffee may find the opportunities provided by instant coffee machines too restrictive.

4. Environmental concerns: Instant coffee machines generate more waste due to the use of single-serve capsules or disposable cups. Having a large amount of waste from packaging materials can contribute to environmental concerns, requiring businesses to implement proper recycling and waste management practices to minimise their ecological footprint. It may also deter more eco-friendly customers who want to think about the environmental impact of their everyday drinks.

5. Lack of freshness: Instant coffee, by its nature, lacks the freshness that can be achieved with freshly ground beans. The flavour and aroma of instant coffee doesn't always match the quality of coffee brewed from roasted beans, which can be a drawback for businesses aiming to provide a premium coffee experience.

While instant coffee machines offer speed, convenience, and cost-effectiveness, it's important to consider the potential compromises in coffee quality and customisation. Understanding your target market, their preferences, and the desired coffee experience will help you determine whether an instant coffee machine is the right choice for your business.

Factors to consider

WHEN SELECTING A COMMERCIAL COFFEE MACHINE

Choosing the right commercial coffee machine for your business is a fundamental decision that can significantly impact the quality of your coffee, customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. With such a wide range of choices, it's key to think about several vital factors before purchasing. Here are some important things to keep in mind when selecting a commercial coffee machine.



WHERE WILL YOUR COFFEE MACHINE BE USED?

Selecting the right commercial coffee machine begins with understanding the right settings for its use – different machines serve different purposes and have different uses.

COFFEE MACHINES FOR COFFEE SHOPS

In a bustling cafe or coffee shop where customers expect quick and high-quality beverages, a powerful espresso machine could be the ideal choice. Look for models that offer multiple group heads and have the capacity to handle a high volume of shots per hour. Features like a built-in grinder, steam wand for frothing milk, and programmable settings to streamline the barista's workflow during peak hours can have a big impact on serving a lot of people quickly.

COFFEE MACHINES FOR AN OFFICE OR WORKPLACE

For an office or workplace setting, where convenience and ease of use are top priority, an automatic or bean-to-cup machine could be more suitable. These machines can prepare a variety of coffee drinks with a push of a button, making them user-friendly for employees without barista experience. Keep an eye out for models with large water reservoirs and self-cleaning functions to keep maintenance as easy as possible.

COFFEE MACHINES IN SELF-SERVE ENVIRONMENT

In self-serve environments, such as hotel lobbies or buffet areas, a batch brewer or a coffee urn might be a better choice. These machines can brew large quantities of coffee at once, providing a constant supply for guests without the need for someone overseeing operations all the time.

Understanding the specific requirements of a coffee machine's location will help with making an informed decision that aligns with the needs of both the business and its customers or employees.

SIZE OF THE MACHINE

When selecting a commercial coffee machine, its size has a huge impact on your business. It needs to be suited for the space available and still meet your needs. There are a few things to think about when choosing a machine size.

AVAILABLE SPACE

Before delving into the technical aspects of the coffee machine, it's important to assess where you want to put your machine. Measure the space carefully, taking into account any surrounding equipment or potential obstructions. This initial evaluation will narrow down the options and prevent disappointment later in the decision-making process.

POWER

Check with the manufacturer to see what power the coffee machine needs. Standard electrical sockets, like the ones you'll have at home, are 13-amp. 13-amp machines are easy to install, but they have limitations and can only make one coffee at a time.

32-amp machines are capable of handling more drinks and are often found in small-to-medium sized cafés and restaurants. Larger bean-to-cup machines are usually 32-amp. The increased power allows for faster heating, more brewing options and better consistency during peak hours.

The final choice in power is a 3-phase machine. These are heavy duty machines, but the increased power is great for consistency and reliability during very busy periods.

HOW MANY GROUP HEADS

Generally, for smaller cafes with moderate footfall, a 1-group or 2-group machine can be enough to handle coffee needs efficiently.

Medium-sized establishments may benefit from a 2-group or 3-group machine, while larger coffee shops or high-traffic locations may opt for a 3-group or 4-group machine.

Ultimately, it's important to strike a balance between meeting your customers' demands, optimizing operational efficiency, and staying within your budget and space limitations. Consulting with a reputable coffee machine supplier or manufacturer can also provide valuable insights to help you make the right choice for your business.



VARIETY OF DRINKS

Being able to offer a diverse range of drinks is key to a good coffee shop experience, because you can cater to different customer preferences and expand your menu offerings. There are quite a few different drink offerings to consider!

- **Espresso-based drinks:** Espresso-based beverages like cappuccinos, lattes, macchiatos and americanos are staples in many coffee shops. You may want to ensure the coffee machine you select can produce these drinks consistently, with high quality every time. Look for devices with multiple group heads, allowing you to extract various espresso shots simultaneously.
- **Milk-based drinks:** If your business specialises in milk-based drinks like cappuccinos and lattes, consider a machine with a reliable milk frothing system. Features such as steam wands or automatic milk frothers can create creamy, velvety milk foam for latte art and enhance the presentation of your beverages, so they're important features to look out for.
- **Alternative brewing methods:** Offering alternative brewing methods can attract coffee enthusiasts looking for unique flavours and brewing techniques. Consider machines that can brew using methods such as pour-over, French press or cold brew. This lets you cater to customers who appreciate different brewing styles and flavour profiles.

- **Tea and hot chocolate:** Many customers enjoy tea or hot chocolate in addition to coffee. There may even be non-coffee drinkers who are drawn in by the temptation of chocolatey goodness. If this is something you want to offer, look for machines with dedicated hot water dispensers, or steam wands capable of producing hot water, for brewing tea or mixing hot chocolate. With these, you'll have a more versatile range of drinks available to please all customers.

- **Customisable options:** Some coffee machines offer customisable drink options, so you can adjust things like coffee strength, milk-to-coffee ratio and temperature. This is handy if you want to provide personalised drinks to your customers, giving you the freedom to provide whatever a customer wants with ease.

- **Speciality beverages:** It's always worth thinking about the demand for speciality beverages in your target market. Drinks like flavoured coffees, seasonal flavours or signature creations unique to your business can give you the edge over other cafes or restaurants. Look for machines that offer flexibility and customisation, allowing you to create and experiment with new recipes.

By choosing a coffee machine that offers a variety of drinks, you can attract a broader customer base, cater to different tastes and provide a more engaging, versatile menu. This can set your business apart from others, and give an awesome customer experience.



QUALITY

When selecting a commercial coffee machine, quality should be top priority. The quality of your coffee greatly affects your customers' satisfaction and the reputation of your business. Customers who find good quality coffee will almost always come back for more. Here are some things to consider when assessing the quality of a coffee machine.

FRESHNESS OF THE COFFEE BEANS

The freshness of the coffee beans used in your commercial coffee machine is a huge part in ensuring a superior coffee experience, and freshness is affected by a number of things.

- **Bean storage:** Coffee beans are susceptible to air, light, moisture and temperature changes. Choose a machine that provides proper storage conditions for your beans, like airtight compartments or containers with built-in bean hoppers. This will help preserve the freshness and flavour of the beans.
- **Bean roasting date:** Check the packaging or labelling of the coffee beans to determine the roasting date. Fresher beans tend to produce more rich and flavourful coffee. Aim for beans roasted within a few weeks of your purchase to ensure optimal freshness.
- **Bean sourcing and quality:** Pay attention to the origin and quality of the coffee beans used in the machine. Choose reputable suppliers or speciality coffee roasters known for their commitment to sourcing high-quality, ethically sourced beans. Freshly roasted, high-quality beans will contribute to a far superior coffee taste.

FRESHNESS OF THE GRIND

The freshness of the coffee grind is just as important as the freshness of the beans. Pre-ground coffee can lose its flavour and aroma quickly, compromising the overall quality of the coffee. Think about these key things when you're investigating coffee machines for fresh grind quality.

- **Built-in grinder:** Opt for a commercial coffee machine with a built-in grinder. Grinding coffee beans before brewing them preserves the natural oils, flavours and aromas, resulting in a more flavourful cup of coffee. Machines with adjustable grind settings cater to different brewing methods and preferences, helping keep your coffee fresher.
- **Grind consistency:** Consistent grind size is crucial for an even extraction and balanced flavour profile. Choose a machine that can produce a consistent grind size to give uniform extraction, helping to avoid over- or under-extraction of the coffee. This won't only help with freshness but with taste, allowing customers to enjoy a reliable flavour that won't change from cup to cup.
- **On-demand grinding:** A machine that grinds beans on-demand means it grinds only the amount needed for each brew. This ensures the freshest possible grind and minimises waste.
- **Grind adjustment:** Different coffee beverages may require different grind sizes. Using a machine that offers adjustable grind settings, you can customise the grind size based on the brewing method or specific coffee recipe.

You can provide an amazing coffee experience for your customers by prioritising the freshness of your coffee beans and grind. Freshly roasted beans and on-demand grinding contribute to a flavourful, aromatic cup of coffee, which will help to enhance the overall quality of your brews.



PRESSURE IN THE COFFEE MACHINE

The pressure in an espresso machine controls the extraction of flavours from coffee grounds. Ideally, pressure should be anywhere between 9 and 10 bars to give the best quality espresso extraction.

Larger machines with more power can deliver this pressure more consistently when being used lots in a short time. Smaller machines might suffer from pressure faults if they're being used heavily.

WATER QUALITY

When drinking a cup of coffee, 98% of your drink is water. That's why high-quality water is essential for better-tasting coffee. Use water in your machine that is free from impurities and doesn't affect the machine's components.

WATER FILTRATION

Filtering water will help with removing impurities and mineral deposits – especially if you're in a hard water area. You'll need a water filtration system to do this. This will help your coffee to taste good and to extend the life of your machine. At Ringtons, we recommend a Brita filter on every coffee machine.

INSTALLATION

Proper installation of a coffee machine isn't just important for making coffee well – it's also crucial for functionality and safety. Follow manufacturer guidelines if you're installing your machine yourself, or seek professional help when needed. When you work with Ringtons, we want to equip you with a machine you're happy with and that works exactly as it should. Check out our work with Klondyke to see how we handle great installation.

UPKEEP AND MAINTENANCE

To get the best performance out of your machine, and to make sure it withstands the test of time, you'll need regular upkeep and maintenance. Manufacturers should provide you with maintenance schedules to stick to, making it easier to know when and how to service your coffee machine.

CLEANING

Implement a regular cleaning routine to keep the coffee machine and its components free from coffee residues and oils, ensuring a clean and hygienic brew. This won't only improve your coffee flavours; it will also showcase your gold standard towards general cleanliness and hygiene to your customers.

CONSIDER THE MACHINE'S FEATURES

When selecting a commercial coffee machine for your business, you'll need to look into all the various features on offer. Different elements in commercial coffee machines can significantly impact functionality, convenience and even quality of the coffee being produced. Depending on the types of drinks you want to serve and your target market, there's plenty to think about.

MILK FROTHING

If you serve a lot of milk-based beverages, like cappuccinos or lattes, a coffee machine with a milk frothing feature could be just what you need. Machines with steam wands or automatic milk frothers can create rich, creamy foam to enhance the texture and presentation of your drinks.

MULTIPLE BOILERS

Machines equipped with multiple boilers are more efficient and faster to operate. With separate boilers for brewing and steaming, you can simultaneously extract espresso shots and froth milk without compromising on performance.

BREWER AND BOILER SIZE

The size of the brewer and boiler will determine how much coffee you can make at speed. Larger brewers and boilers allow for increased brewing capacity and faster production of multiple cups of coffee. Choose a machine with the right sized brewer and boiler to suit your average number of customers – you don't want to keep people waiting too long for their daily caffeine hit.

PROGRAMMABLE SETTINGS

Some coffee machines offer programmable settings. These settings allow you to customise your water temperature, shot volume and pre-infusion time. These will all give you greater control over the brewing process and allow you to fine-tune the coffee's taste and strength more accurately.

GRINDERS

Integrated grinders are valuable, because you can grind coffee beans on demand. This will make sure you've got maximum freshness and flavour. Look out for high quality burr grinders, as these provide consistent grind sizes and adjustable settings to accommodate different brewing methods.

With so many options out there, looking at the different elements of different coffee machines will help you choose a model that aligns with your business requirements, enhances productivity and produces high-quality coffee. Each aspect contributes to the overall functionality and convenience of the machine, and your machine should work for you rather than against you. You'll want the right machine to give customers the best service possible.



ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A NEW COMMERCIAL COFFEE MACHINE?

Picking the best commercial coffee machine for your business is a complex process, made up of many different considerations. You can make an informed decision by understanding your business needs, exploring different types of machines and evaluating key features.

Remember; a suitable coffee machine enhances the coffee experience for your customers, makes your baristas' lives easier, and contributes to the success of your business. If you're interested in further reading, check out our related blog posts on the benefits of having a commercial coffee machine for your office, and enhancing coffee shops with a Ringtons commercial coffee machine. And when it comes to purchasing, there's different options to rent, lease or buy. You can decide which option is right for you and your business when you need to.

Need more support in choosing the right machine for your business? At Ringtons, we're always here to help. You can chat to our coffee experts to help you at any stage of your journey.



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would work best for your business.

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