



**HI FRIENDS! SORRY WE MISSED YOU** in the last edition of *Barista Mag*, but we've been super busy wrenching on machines and growing our team at Black Rabbit Service Co. While on a break from the column, we rolled out new service programs in Los Angeles and Seattle! That's right—you can now find Black Rabbit Service technicians in both of those cities and, of course, our hometown of Portland, Ore. We are stoked about the amazing technicians we've brought on, and humbled by the warm welcomes we've received. OK, OK, enough of the shameless plug—let's get to work ...

*I've noticed that many baristas don't know how to program and dial-in a batch brewer. Is this not common practice in all shops?*

As technicians, we always need to be mindful about who we hand the keys to. We often let our roaster and trainer friends decide what's important for the baristas to know in the world of programming and dialing-in. Most roasters spend a lot of time developing recipes and profiles for their coffee, and we don't want to get in the way of all that hard work. We will go over the basics with owners and managers, but it's easy to

forget if you don't access those settings on a semi-regular basis. Even the best techs out there will refer to manuals for programming machines they might not see very often.

We also get a fair amount of service calls from folks playing around with programming. It's usually something that's relatively simple to fix, but it can be difficult to troubleshoot over the phone (especially if you don't mention you were messing around with programming!).

A lot of manufacturers make accessing programming modes more difficult than they need to be. Turn it off, push this button, turn it on, rub your tummy, pat your head. I think if you and the café owner are cool with sharing that info and letting people play with brew parameters, go for it! If it were me, I would set a base recipe that's easy to remember and refer to later just in case things get a little squirrely. Have fun!

—Double J

*Are preventive maintenance visits really worth it, or is that just a tech trying to create a steady stream of income?*

I love this question! The answer is both. Preventive maintenance is an important part of having a healthy understanding of what is going on with your machine on a regular ongoing

Preventive maintenance calls are all in the name of lessening emergency service calls and downtime (i.e., lost business) for the café owner. The other side of this coin is that your technician is also running their own business, and does need cash flow to continue to operate. Tech companies have a lot of overhead in terms of vehicle maintenance, insurance, warehouse and workbench space, parts inventory, and many other things that have to be maintained in order to make sure we are available to come running when that call comes in. If techs only relied on emergency calls to pay the bills, there would be days or weeks where they may not have any work to do. A tech without regular work is not going to be a tech for long.

One great way a lot of good techs and service companies do this is to set up a recurring service package where the customer has regular (say, quarterly) visits, which keeps you and your technician up to date with all the goings-on in your equipment, and keeps your machines running top-notch at all times, rather than in a cycle of working great for a couple months before steadily declining into terrible shot consistency and major repairs. Regular preventive maintenance calls also help you as the business owner to better budget the service work you may need over the year and figure it into your cost

## There are a lot of shady mechanics in every repair industry, and coffee tech is no exception.

basis and catching things that may become a problem before they actually do (i.e. preventive-ly). A qualified and attentive tech won't just show up to change gaskets and screens, and get the heck out of there and on to the next call. They should really be spending the time they are there in your café pushing every button, turning every knob, and fiddling with every doohickey on your machine. They should be listening for odd sounds (hissing, clicking, etc.), checking for proper pressure and flow rates, looking for leaks, and really giving your machine a good look and listen. After all of that, a good tech should go over all of their findings with you to keep you aware of possible issues on the horizon, in an effort to help you plan and budget for upcoming expenses rather than being blindsided by a broken pressurestat or a blown heating element.

of doing business instead of being surprised by a big bill you weren't counting on.

—Alex

*How can I prepare myself for the real cost of maintenance? How do I avoid sticker shock?*

At Black Rabbit Service, we offer service packages. I know other service companies have things called subscriptions, contracts, memberships, etc. But as far as I know, the idea is the same. We build packages by figuring out all the parts and labor you'll need for a 12-month period and total it all up. Depending on what equipment and filtration you have, most of our packages land somewhere between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for the year. We take a small deposit upfront and break out the

rest into 12 monthly payments that range from \$165 to \$250. In my opinion, that's a lot easier to budget for than a \$500+ bill every three months.

We can break it down even more, too. If we have a \$3,000 service package for the year, it works out to about \$8.22 a day. That's all the café needs to clear in order to cover the cost of preventative maintenance for a year! I can't speak for other companies, but we also incentivize purchasing service packages by offering discounts on service calls that might pop up between the quarterly visits. I hope that helps!

—Double J

*How do I know if my tech is qualified? I don't know much about equipment, so it's hard for me to know.*

This is a tough one to answer. One great option would be to ask your equipment manufacturer if they have recommendations or factory-trained technicians in your area. There are a lot of shady mechanics in every repair industry, and coffee tech is no exception. This doesn't necessarily disqualify a tech who may have 20 years of fixing machines under their belt, but I am always a little wary of any repair people—in any industry—who haven't gotten any proper factory training or at least apprenticed under someone who has.

You can also reach out to other shop owners in your area and see what techs they would recommend. If two or three

shops give you the same recommendation, it's a good bet that the tech might be worth trying. I always want techs I work with to be knowledgeable, but also easy to talk to and able to explain complicated issues in easy-to-understand, clear terms without overwhelming someone with jargon or overly technical answers.

At the end of the day, go with your gut. If you get a bad vibe, or feel like the person you are working with isn't a good fit, then keep asking around to find out who else in your area might be a better fit. Hope that helps!

—Alex

## Got a question about coffee equipment?

We'd love to help! Just email your thoughts and queries to [highmaintenance@baristamagazine.com](mailto:highmaintenance@baristamagazine.com).

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