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# What Food Manufacturers Want from an MRO

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**Maintenance, repair and operations (MRO) suppliers are a critical resource for keeping a food facility up and running. *Food Manufacturing* conducted a survey to gauge how our readers interact with their MRO suppliers, as well as what matters most when it comes to choosing a supplier.**

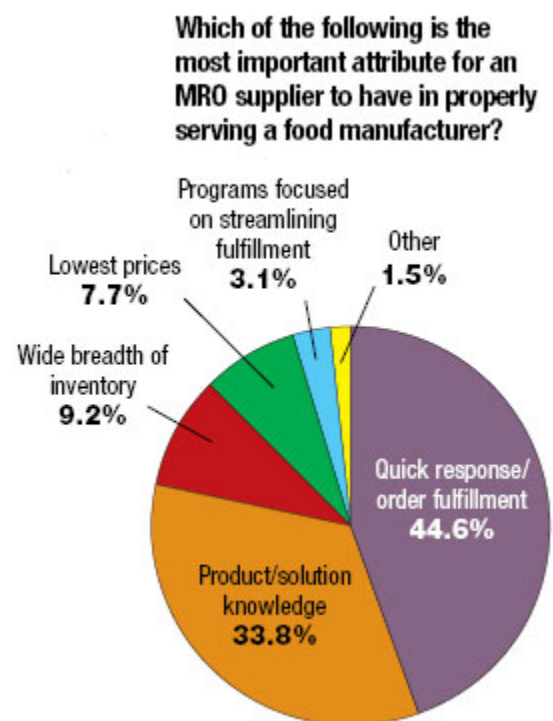
In a high volume industry like food manufacturing, companies rely on the ability to keep down time at a minimum, and nothing can bring production to a halt like an equipment malfunction. When processing equipment breaks down, it is critical for food companies to have a reliable set of MRO suppliers that can have the plant up and running again as soon as possible.

The need for a quick turnaround was evident when readers were asked about the most important attribute for a supplier to have in properly serving a food manufacturer. As noted in the chart at right, processors most greatly valued quick response and order fulfillment.

Interestingly, processors were much less interested in suppliers having a wide breadth of inventory. This seems to indicate that food companies work with a variety of suppliers to meet their maintenance and repair needs. In fact, when asked how many MRO suppliers they currently work with, 56.9 percent of survey respondents said they do business with two to five suppliers. Only 10.8 percent stated that they work with one supplier.

A case of equipment malfunction leaves processors looking for a fast repair or replacement, and it seems that they are willing to pay the price. When presented with the situation, "A motor on one of your conveyor lines fails; which of the following will you do to replace that motor?" Food Manufacturing readers reported:

- Call your sales contacts at various MRO suppliers to compare delivery times — 50%
- Call your sales contacts at various MRO suppliers to compare prices — 32.8%



- • No research necessary, you always deal with the same person/company — 26.6%
- • Check a number of suppliers' websites — 23.4%
- • Check a number of suppliers' printed catalogs — 14.1%
- Other — 7.8%

After checking to compare delivery times and prices, 55.4 percent of survey respondents indicated that they would select the supplier with the fastest turnaround time. Surprisingly, only 7.7 percent said they would choose the cheapest supplier, with 30.8 percent selecting the MRO supplier with whom they have the best relationship.

Selecting a new supplier comes with its own set of concerns for food manufacturers. Nearly 27 percent of readers said that response time was most important when considering working with a new supplier. Product knowledge and customer service were also important to survey respondents, with 25 percent and 20.3 percent, respectively, saying these factors were most important. One reader noted that suppliers should have "exceptional customer service and knowledgeable individuals with a can-do attitude."

Once a supplier has been chosen, processors expect to be provided with knowledgeable service in an efficient manner. If MRO suppliers do not meet expectations, they risk losing their customers. Survey respondents said that they "fired" an average of one or two suppliers in a given year because these suppliers had let their company down in some way.

*Food Manufacturing* readers consider a number of qualities when determining whether to continue doing business with their suppliers. Twenty-six percent of survey respondents indicated that customer service played the greatest role in choosing to continue working with an MRO supplier, while an equal number were most motivated by a supplier's product knowledge. Only 23.1 percent named response time as their top concern.

This suggests that, in practice, food companies value a job well done over a fast repair that may not as high in quality. Not only must MRO suppliers be ready to assess a situation and provide a solution quickly, but they must also maintain a high level of service to ensure that all solutions are effective and long-lasting.

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