

Coffee shop equipment list: *buying mistakes* vs the right method

 By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-10-26 · Costing & Finance

MASTERRESTAURANT®

Checklist

Equipo para cafetería: los errores al comprarlo vs el método correcto

Método probado en +8.400 restaurantes · 43 países

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QUICK VERDICT

The right coffee shop equipment list is the one your menu can pay for: cost every drink first, then buy, because 42% of US restaurant operators reported their location was not profitable in 2025 (National Restaurant Association).

In Diego F. Parra's Masterrestaurant method the order is the reverse of habit, menu and cost per cup first, then grinder and water, and the espresso machine last, once you know how many cups leave the bar in the peak hour. Equipment payments are a fixed cost that belongs in break-even, never inside the cost of a drink.

✅ **Checklist** Actionable checklist with a measurable “done” criterion per item · 14 min read · 2026-10-26

A coffee shop spends its first big money before it sells a single cup, usually on gear picked at a trade show or from a vendor catalog with no costed recipe behind it. Demand is not the issue: 66% of American adults drink coffee every day according to the National Coffee Association (2025), and Colombia reached 2.8 kilograms per person in 2023, as La República reported.

The hard part is that this demand is split among many shops, and the one that opens with an oversized machine carries a monthly payment its real volume cannot cover.

At Masterrestaurant we treat equipment the way the cash register sees it, a fixed cost the menu pays through contribution margin, cup by cup. That turns a coffee shop business plan from a shopping list into math that closes. Specialty demand is real, with 48% of US adults drinking specialty coffee the previous day (NCA, 2025), yet specialty also means cold brew and pour-over, which do not require a three-group espresso machine.

What happens if you buy big and sales land at half the plan? The payment stays, the margin per cup falls short, a price hike follows that regulars reject, and the machine ends up sold at a discount to the next owner who repeats the mistake.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Coffee shop equipment list, side by side

	BUYING MISTAKE	RIGHT METHOD (DONE-CRITERION · FREQUENCY · OWNER)
Espresso machine	✗ Chosen by group count, brand or showroom looks.	✓ Sized to projected peak-hour cups from the costed menu. Done: manufacturer capacity sheet vs estimated peak. Once, reviewed quarterly. Owner.
Grinder	✗ The cheapest one, to offset the machine.	✓ One grinder per coffee the menu requires, with fine adjustment. Done: dial-in grams discarded logged every morning. Daily. Lead barista.
Refrigeration	✗ Installed and ignored until the milk spoils.	✓ Temperature log twice a day plus dairy counts vs POS sales. Daily and weekly. Manager.
Water filtration	✗ Skipped because nobody sees it.	✓ Filter installed before the first shot and changed per manufacturer. Done: date of last change written down. Monthly. Manager.
POS and inventory	✗ Register with no recipes, inventory by eye.	✓ Every drink loaded with its standard recipe. Done: weekly count with variance explained. Weekly. Manager and owner.
Equipment financing	✗ Sign whatever payment the vendor offers and load it into drink cost.	✓ Monthly payment added to rent and payroll in break-even. Done: required daily cups below a normal day's sales. Monthly. Owner.

Put it to work in your restaurant: 21-day restaurant food cost challenge →

What must the equipment meet before you sign the purchase order?

It must come from a costed menu, with every drink written into its standard recipe and its contribution margin per cup, before you quote a single machine.

The order matters more than the brand, because the espresso machine, the grinder and the cold display case are paid for by what each cup sold leaves behind, not by the excitement of opening day.

That is why at Masterrestaurant the first box on this checklist is about accounting before it is about hardware: the sales mix you expect, how many straight espressos, how many filter coffees, how many cold drinks and how many milk drinks will go out in the peak hour, written on a sheet and not kept in your head. If that sheet does not exist, there is nothing to buy yet, however good the trade-show deal looks.

Compliance criterion, no nuance: no quote gets approved without the costing sheet signed by whoever will run the bar, and the supplier receives that sheet instead of a wish list.

Size the machine by cups per hour, not by group heads

The espresso machine is chosen by the cups your bar will serve in its busiest hour, and the number of groups comes afterward, as a consequence of that math. Take an EXAMPLE: if the plan says 60 espresso drinks between seven and eight in the morning, one barista with two well-dialed groups gets them out without a line, and a third group only adds a monthly payment plus upkeep on a head almost nobody uses.

The grinder works the other way, and here I was wrong for years when I preached caution across the board: it is the piece where you do NOT save, because an uneven grind forces you to dump calibration doses every morning and turns coffee you paid for into waste. The verifiable criterion is simple.

The purchase sheet records the cups expected at peak against the rated capacity of the equipment, and the gap between them stays within what your written growth plan justifies.

The top 5 almost everyone fails, and what each failure costs

These five points get missed in most openings, and each one carries a price at the register. The first is buying too many groups: for example, if the extra group adds 4,500 dollars financed over 36 months, your menu carries about 125 dollars a month before selling anything. Second, the cheap grinder, which charges you every day in dialed-in coffee that ends up in the trash.

Third, a refrigerated case with no rotation plan, where pastry that does not sell that day is lost whole. The fourth is forgetting the water filter and descaling, since a boiler full of scale gets fixed with a service call and parts, and meanwhile the bar sells no espresso. Fifth, signing without a service contract that states a response time in writing, and every morning closed is a sale nobody gets back.

If I had to keep just one, I pick the first, because you pay it the same even when the café sells well.

How is café equipment financed and deducted in the U.S.?

An SBA 7(a) loan can finance machinery and equipment up to USD 5 million, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the IRS allows deducting a large share of equipment purchases in tax year 2025.

Both caps are current as of consulting the source; confirm them at the official link before you sign, because they can change without notice. But a ceiling that high is misleading, since it was built for companies of another scale, and a neighborhood bar never gets near it. The deduction, moreover, only lowers taxes when there is profit to subtract it from, and a café's first year rarely has any.

My position is firm: credit solves opening-day cash, yet the purchase is justified by the contribution of the cups. Compliance criterion: your accountant reviews eligibility in writing, and the payment fits inside the margin of the worst month in the forecast.

The barista's cost also picks the machine

Every minute behind the bar has a price, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics puts the median wage of food and beverage serving workers, a category that includes baristas, at USD 15.24 per hour as of May 2025. That figure changes the equipment conversation.

A super-automatic saves training and minutes, although it flattens the cup a specialty customer comes looking for; the manual machine delivers that cup, in exchange for a barista who knows how to dial in. The tension resolves on the menu: if most of your sales are milk drinks and cold beverages, time saved weighs more, and if you sell straight espresso and single-origin filter, quality weighs more.

In Diego F. Parra's method the rule becomes one more box: the supplier proves, stopwatch in hand, how many minutes of cleaning and adjustment the equipment demands per shift, and that time is costed as part of the payment.

How to implement the checklist in the real routine?

The checklist lives at the bar, not in a binder, and every box has an owner and a frequency. Before buying, you and your head barista walk through it together in a single session with the quotes on the table.

On installation day, the supplier's technician signs off the handover with boiler pressure, group temperature and reference dose written down. Each morning, the opening barista logs the grams of coffee discarded until the grind is dialed in, plus the display case temperature, two entries that take under five minutes. Once a week the manager backflushes the machine, checks the water filter and totals seven days of waste.

And at month's end it is your turn, with the math that matters: equipment payment against the real contribution of the cups sold. We insist on that order because the daily routine feeds the monthly decision, and without it the month-end math is done by eye.

How to audit compliance, item by item?

A box with no evidence gets marked as failed, even if everyone swears it was done. For the purchase, the proof is the signed costing sheet and the spec sheet with expected cups against capacity.

On the grinder, you audit the trend in grams discarded during calibration: if it rises three weeks in a row, the burrs are wearing or the coffee changed, and you act before waste eats the month's margin. Water leaves a trail in the date of the last filter change and in the hardness reading, and the display case in its temperature log.

The service contract is checked with a test call, where you time how many hours the technician takes to respond. Masterrestaurant also asks for one number at each month's close, the equipment payment divided by cups sold, because that fixed cost per cup tells you whether the machine works for you or you work for the machine.

The 5 checklist failures almost everyone makes (and what they cost)

Failure 1, buying groups instead of cups. A three-group machine in a low-volume shop is idle capital: for example, if the step from two to three groups were 6,000 dollars financed over three years, that is roughly 167 dollars a month your menu pays before earning anything.

Habits argue for restraint too, since only 11% of US coffee drinkers used an espresso machine for their previous-day coffee, per the National Coffee Association (2025), far behind drip brewers. Failure 2, saving on the grinder. Uneven grinding forces discarded dial-in shots every morning, which is waste before you open; at 20 extra grams a day and 25 dollars per kilo, for example, that is 15 dollars a month from one bad purchase.

The 5 checklist failures almost everyone makes (and what they cost) — in practice

Unlogged refrigeration is the quiet third failure. Milk and pastry are the costliest waste in a coffee shop, and an unchecked case turns restaurant inventory into a guess. Fourth: forgetting water. Scale eats the boiler and the flavor, and the breakdown tends to arrive in high season. No written filter date means the item is NOT done. The fifth costs the most: financing without break-even.

Equipment payments are fixed costs like rent and payroll; the 32% food cost ceiling per drink, a MAXIMUM in Diego F. Parra's method, uses ingredients only. For years I advised buying the biggest machine the budget allowed, for growth, and I was wrong: growth arrives through the menu, the payment arrives on day one.

POINT BY POINT

A/B analysis: buying by catalog vs buying by costed menu

STARTING POINT

A · BUYING MISTAKE Vendor catalog and the bar you admire most.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT The menu with cost per cup and expected volume.

Verdict: The costed menu wins: it shows what gear you need and what is surplus.

MACHINE SIZE

A · BUYING MISTAKE One or two extra groups, just in case.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Peak-hour capacity with modest headroom, expanded when sales demand it.

Verdict: Peak hour wins. Growth is financed by proven sales, not an early payment.

TAX BENEFIT (US)

A · BUYING MISTAKE Overbuy because it is deductible.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Use the IRS deduction for equipment purchases (current when checked; confirm with your accountant), only on gear volume already justifies.

Verdict: The deduction lowers taxes; it does not make an unpaid machine profitable.

CONTROL AFTER PURCHASE

A · BUYING MISTAKE Equipment gets checked when it breaks.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Daily and weekly logs plus three monthly KPIs: peak-hour cups, milk waste, cost per cup.

Verdict: Logged control wins: waste nobody records never gets fixed.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

How equipment usually gets bought **MISTAKE**

- ✗ Machine first.
- ✗ Extra groups for growth that has no menu, customers or barista behind it yet, and that shows up as a fixed payment from month one.
- ✗ Cheap grinder
- ✗ No temperature or water logs, so waste appears as a mystery on the P&L.

How to buy with the Masterrestaurant method

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- ✓ Costed menu before any quote.
- ✓ Machine sized to the real peak hour.
- ✓ A grinder that holds its dial-in, because an unstable one makes every shift's cup different and every discarded shot is coffee you paid for and never sold.
- ✓ Payment in break-even, never in the recipe

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Verified figures for the equipment decision

42%

of US restaurant operators said their location was not profitable in 2025

66%

of US adults drink coffee every day (2025)

48%

of US adults had specialty coffee the previous day (2025)

11%

of US coffee drinkers used an espresso machine the previous day (2025)

2.8kg

coffee consumed per person in Colombia in 2023

15.24

USD/H

median hourly wage, food and beverage serving workers incl. baristas (US, May 2025)

5

M USD

maximum SBA 7(a) loan, usable
for machinery and equipment

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

of US restaurant operators said their location was not profitable in 2025



of US adults drink coffee every day (2025)



of US adults had specialty coffee the previous day (2025)



of US coffee drinkers used an espresso machine the previous day (2025)



coffee consumed per person in Colombia in 2023



median hourly wage, food and beverage serving workers incl. baristas (US, May 2025)



Sources: [National Restaurant Association 2026](#) · [National Coffee Association 2025](#) · [La República 2024](#) · [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2025](#) · [U.S. Small Business Administration](#)

Chart by [masterrestaurant.com](#)

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE (COMPOSITE)

“We had a three-group machine and two imported grinders quoted, and once we costed the fourteen drinks on the menu we saw the peak hour never passed forty cups; we bought a two-group machine, and within six weeks milk waste dropped by half because we finally logged every pitcher.”

— Owner of a 28-seat neighborhood coffee shop in Medellín, illustrative case

Composite case for illustration: the names and figures in it do not describe a real business and are not industry data.

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

4-phase checklist to buy your coffee shop equipment



Phase 1 · Cost the menu before any quote

Write a standard recipe for every drink, grams of coffee, milk, cup and lid, and cost it with a menu pricing calculator or a simple sheet. Done: every drink under the 32% food cost ceiling, which is the maximum, not the target. Owner. Once before buying, then monthly.



Phase 2 · Size for the peak hour, not the wish

Project cups per hour in your busiest window and size groups, grinders, refrigeration and dishwashing to it with modest headroom. Count who runs the bar: the median wage for food and beverage serving workers, baristas included, was USD 15.24 an hour per the Bureau of Labor Statistics (May 2025), current when the source was checked; confirm it at the official link. A bar that needs two people instead of one moves break-even more than the machine price.



Phase 3 · Set the maintenance and waste routine

Each machine opens with its log: dial-in grams discarded (daily, barista), fridge temperature twice a day (daily, shift), water filter change with date (monthly, manager), dairy and coffee counts vs POS (weekly, manager). No written record, not done.



Phase 4 · Close financing against break-even

Add the monthly equipment payment to rent, payroll and utilities, divide by average contribution margin per cup, and you get the daily cups you must sell. If that beats a normal day, buy smaller, refurbished or in stages. Then track three restaurant KPIs monthly: peak-hour cups, milk waste, cost per cup. Owner.

FAQ

Coffee shop equipment FAQ

What coffee shop equipment should you buy first?

Cost the menu first, with the cost per cup of every drink; then buy the grinder and water filtration, and leave the espresso machine for last, sized to the cups your bar serves in the peak hour. Refrigeration, a POS loaded with recipes and dishwashing complete the list. Equipment payments go into break-even alongside rent and payroll, never inside the cost of a drink.

What is on a coffee shop equipment list?

A coffee shop equipment list covers grinder, an espresso machine sized to your peak hour, logged refrigeration, water filtration, dishwashing and a POS with recipes loaded. Your costed menu sets the exact list: if a drink is not on the menu, its gear waits.

How do you start a coffee shop business without overbuying equipment?

Start with the menu and cost per cup, then size equipment to realistic peak-hour cups and test the payment against break-even. Buy smaller or refurbished when the required daily cups exceed what a normal day sells, and expand once sales prove it.

Do I need a coffee shop business license before buying equipment?

Check licensing and health permits before ordering equipment, because rules change by state, county and city and can dictate sinks, refrigeration and layout. Confirm current requirements with your local health department and city office; treat any checklist online as a reference, not the rule.

Can I finance coffee shop equipment with a loan?

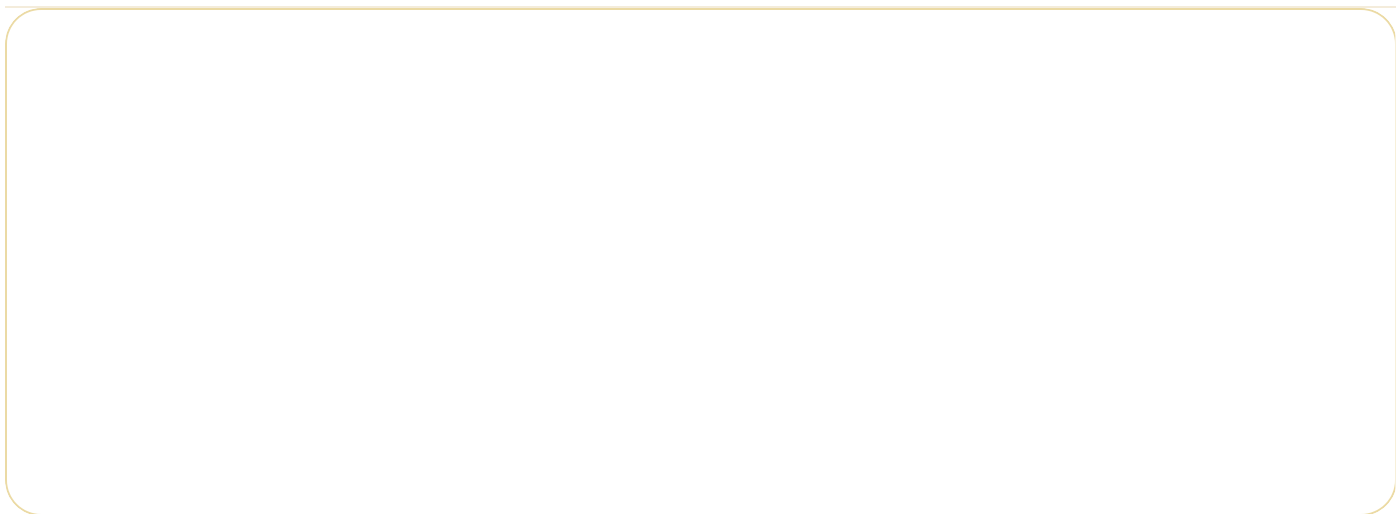
Yes: in the US an SBA 7(a) loan can fund machinery and equipment, up to USD 5 million per the U.S. Small Business Administration, current when the source was checked. Confirm it at the official link, and finance only if the payment fits break-even.

DATA & SOURCES

Coffee shop equipment list: 2026 data from official sources

Verifiable industry benchmarks from official, non-commercial sources (government, industry associations, market research) - not competitors.

Metric	Value	Source
Active bar and restaurant establishments in Brazil	1.379.420 establecimientos (agosto 2024)	ABRASEL / Gobierno federal de Brasil 2024
Microenterprise share of Brazil bar and restaurant sector	94% microempresas; 65% microemprendedores individuales (MEI)	ABRASEL 2024
Number of UK hospitality businesses	176.685 negocios (marzo 2025)	House of Commons Library 2026
Canada foodservice and drinking places sales 2024	CAD 96.500 millones en 2024 (+4,0% vs 2023)	Statistics Canada 2024
Canada foodservice sales share by segment 2024	servicio limitado 46,4% / servicio completo 43,1% (2024)	Statistics Canada 2024
Restaurant industry share of all Mexican businesses	12.2% of the country's business units	INEGI–CANIRAC 2024



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