

# COFFEE QUALITY FOR PROFITABILITY

by **Spencer Turer**, Director of Coffee Operations at Coffee Analysts

Coffee is a simple pleasure that is enjoyed at work, while commuting to work, at home or just meeting with friends. We prepare coffee ourselves in filter drip brewers, single serve machines, pour over's, plunger pots, and can easily purchase coffee in vending machines. We all know what we like and how it is best prepared. So what's the problem?

At issue is the business of coffee, which is much more complicated than brewing for our own enjoyment. Coffee quality can be segregated into two categories, business profit and sensory uniformity. The end product of coffee quality will be realized in your revenue and profits, and within your operational efficiencies.

In its most basic form, coffee is an agricultural crop that has variations and inconsistencies within each harvest year and between countries of origins. These changes in coffee product attributes are managed by skilled roasters who supply our coffee products. However, even the most reputable roaster will end up with a coffee product that varies from time to time, as a result of the manufacturing process and the coffee product itself. These variations may affect the coffee cost and/or the flavor and aroma

attributes of the product you are buying and re-selling. Coffee roasters each have their own quality control functions, but it is best to remember that quality is defined by the buyer.

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One way to have more control over your coffee program is to have product specifications and to understand the implications of an out-of-spec coffee. Product specifications are not just for private label or private brand coffee products. Product specifications are measurable standards used to define product quality and consistency and should be provided when buying any coffee products. Regardless of purchase quantity, all buyers have the right to inspect the products purchased. Buyers should insure that the coffee product meets expectations and specifications for manufacturing standards and beverage quality.



When product specifications are used, both the seller and the buyer are protected and complaints can more easily be resolved regarding manufacturing issues, defects or concerns about flavor and aroma. It is a "best practice" within the coffee industry and full inspection and product evaluation should be standard procedure for the purchase of any food item. Good business practices dictate that every purchase is inspected: from produce at the grocery store, to electronics, car purchases, articles of clothing, or even for a case of beer - the inspection includes quantity, appearance, verification of all parts and accessories, usability, and examination for defects. Buy from who you trust, but also verify as a matter of business.

The usual, simple inspection of coffee quality for business protection is twofold: the number of cases in each purchase and the correct quantity of each product type ordered. A more detailed inspection to protect the buyer from financial issues will include counting the number of packages within each case, testing the net weight of the coffee, and evaluating the moisture and roast development in the coffee. Each of these items will have financial implications for your purchasing versus what you are receiving to be sure you are getting what you are paying for. In any commodity transaction the buyer is

seeking to receive the highest acceptable quality for the price and the seller is seeking to deliver the lowest acceptable quality for the price, and the difference between the two will be unforeseen profit or loss. For this reason, a prudent business practice is to trust and verify. As the buyer you should protect your clients from any abnormalities or inconsistencies in the product that you will be selling to them.

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**COFFEE CONSUMERS ARE BRAND LOYAL, PRODUCT LOYAL AND LIKELY HAVE THE BEVERAGE PREPARED THE SAME WAY EVERY TIME.**

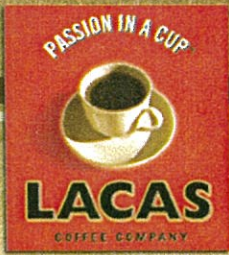
Sensory evaluations are critical components to a product specification. How does the coffee product look, smell, taste? Consumers expect coffee beverages to be uniform and consistent from cup to cup, week to week, and month to month.

In addition, to the business quality tests, two more tests are important to protect your customers against beverage product variations: grind particle size and sensory analysis. Changes in net weight, moisture percentage, oxygen content, roast development, particle size, blend components and age of the coffee all have the potential to change the overall flavor and aroma profile of the beverage to the consumer. These attributes affect the brew process and thus control the aromatics, sweetness, strength, and flavor intensity of the brewed beverage. Coffee consumers are brand loyal, product loyal and will likely have the beverage prepared the same way every time. Skilled roasters, using scientific controls in blending and roasting, work very hard to insure a uniform and consistent product. Your customers expect you to protect them from any unforeseen or unexpected quality issue. The use of food science and sensory science in a quality control laboratory is critical to managing coffee quality consistency to your customers.

Product analysis using both qualitative and quantities measurements in laboratories will help protect your business and your clients from product issues. Evaluating coffees for physical, chemical, and sensory attributes are standard operating practices for coffee roasters, coffee retailers and coffee foodservice operators.

When the coffee begins to taste atypical or there are questions about the packaging, you can only hope you get the complaint. Too often when the coffee tastes different or the packages have issues you simply lose the customer. ■

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*From our start in 1921, Lacas Coffee has developed into one the nation's oldest independent coffee roasters meeting the needs of the most demanding customers.*

*Regardless of the changing times or tastes, we will continue to scour the globe in search of extraordinary beans from family-owned farms that share our passion for the perfect cup.*

*We hope you enjoy Lacas Coffee as much as we enjoy bringing it to you.*

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