Do not start making home-made noodles YET!

Certain things would be too late to learn after!

5 IMPORTANT things to understand before you start making home-made NOODLES

by Rocky Fujii

Udon, Soba, Ramen restaurant prosperity advisor
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Introduction

Shifting a viewpoint: from Making noodle machines to Using noodle machines

I hate mimicking what others do.
It could have come from my past careers.
I think that it is unethical for an engineer to simply imitate what others have invented by hard thinking.

Truth to be told, in the past I was an aircraft engineer.

After graduating from Takamatsu National College of Mechanical Engineering, I joined Kawasaki Heavy Industries Aircraft Division's Design Department, and was working on the "C-1" transport aircraft and a license production of the "Phantom" fighter jet.

While I was in the aircraft department, I enjoyed my work, and was blessed with good senior colleagues. The three years I spent there were filled with youth passion.
In the following three years, I was transferred to the shipbuilding division, and became in charge of the engine room for a large tanker ship.

In total, my engineering experience at Kawasaki Heavy Industries lasted for 6 years.

Then I left Kawasaki Heavy Industries, and opened my own mechanical design office because I had a great passion for creating something new myself.

It was when first industrial robots began to appear, and I wanted to become a manufacturer of automatic labor-saving machines.
However, unlike now, at the time of the second oil shock, for those living away from big cities it was hard to make a living through a mechanical design only.

I was able to make ends meet by also adding a manufacturing part to my business.
The circumstances I found myself in did not allow for a luxury of picking jobs, so I also had to undertake those which were far away from my dream. For example, with nostalgia I remember that one time I did a job at a slaughterhouse, doing nightshifts there with a bottle of sake as my only
As the area I was living in was famous for its Sanuki udon, I started to have more and more jobs related to noodles.

I was undertaking a lot of mechanical jobs, but when it comes to machines you won’t become a leading player in the field unless you accumulate a great deal of expertise there, so after five years since founding, I decided to focus only on noodle making machines.

It was in 1979 when "Yamato MFG" (‘Yamato Seisakusho’ in Japanese) was founded, and when a revolutionary for those times udon-making machine “Shin’uchi”, combining all for basic elements of udon production – kneading (mixing), pressing, thinning and cutting – was first put on sale.

However, when the “Shinuchi” first went on sale, both customers and competitors were saying that it was “not a noodle making machine”, because of how unconventional it first appeared to be.

Nevertheless, when this noodle machine began to sell well, other companies also began making noodle machines that looked the same way, so our company's noodle machine style became a standard model for commercial noodle making machines.

After that, I had no choice but to devote my time not only to the development and manufacturing of noodle making machines, but also to the development of sales routes, which was something I did not really like to do.

Originally I was an engineer with a typical engineer personality, and I was not good at sales, so I started from south Kyushu where, in the beginning, I did not have to face any competition. But given a high demand for ramen noodles on Kyushu, when selling machines there, we ended up developing a special machine specifically designed to produce ramen noodles. That was how “Richmen” was born.

Next, when we were entering the market of Kanto (central region, including Tokyo) we encountered more demand for machines to produce soba (buckwheat) noodles. At that time, I was part of an association for dissemination of soba making technology which was active in Tokyo region, where I learned traditional soba making methods. So, we designed equipment to produce soba noodles. That was how soba machines “Bando Taro” and "Kojiro" were created.

Although our company is located in the home-ground area of Sanuki Udon, we have a lot of achievements not only in designing noodle machines for udon noodles but for ramen and soba noodles as well.
In 1985, a few years after I started manufacturing and selling noodle making machines, I founded an affiliated company "Sansho" that produces and sells noodles. And, 18 years ago, we also started an udon shop "Kijoan" at Sakaide JR station, and ran it for 15 years.

Originally, I only had to deal with making noodle machines, but after starting a noodle factory and becoming an udon store owner, I found myself to be in a position of using them myself. And recently we have created a noodle laboratory in our company, devoting ourselves to researching what makes noodles delicious.

Based on these real experiences, I would like to talk about what may benefit those who are thinking of starting homemade noodles from an objective standpoint (not from that of a manufacturer of noodle machines).

However, in reality, people in this industry do not want to publicize important points about how to select noodle making machines.

In the past, before the Internet became widespread, people planning to open a noodle shop were in a situation where noodle machine manufacturers or dealers would lease them noodle machines for some time.

Therefore, it was not convenient for the selling side to let prospects know that there were various choices when choosing noodle machines.

But here, with all responsibility I would like to put forward my thoughts in writing, as unlike spoken words, what has been written down in print does not disappear, and I hope this booklet will be helpful for people in the position of using noodle machines.
A shift to homemade noodles

Why would udon, soba, and ramen restaurants use noodle making machines?

If you are just starting a noodle shop, you do not necessarily have to make your own noodles, but you can choose to buy fresh noodles, boiled noodles, or frozen noodles from some noodle making company.

It is hard to believe now, but even here in Kagawa, the birthplace of Sanuki udon, when I was in elementary school udon shops did not make their own noodles in-house but would only warm up pre-boiled noodles they got delivered from noodle producers.

The advent of the 1st Sanuki Udon Boom saw a rise in popularity for homemade noodles made by hand. During the second boom, restaurants, faced with limitations of making noodles by hand, started switching to using noodle machines (hand-making style).

And during the 3rd Sanuki Udon Boom, Kagawa prefecture had more than 900 udon restaurants at its peak, with almost all of them making noodles in-house using noodle-making machines. Although some restaurants were still making noodles by hand, there very were few that made everything from scratch, including making of dough. In Kagawa prefecture, you can say that most Sanuki udon restaurants now rely on noodle machines to make their own noodles.

Some 30 years ago a new trend started within Tokyo's soba noodle stands. Up until then noodles served at soba stands were soggy because they were brought to stands already cooked, and were only warmed up there. But with appearance of “Komoro” and other high-end soba noodle stands, using fresh noodles and boiling them before serving has quickly become a customary practice, and this continues until this day.

It is said that the secret of good soba noodles rests on 3 ‘just’s: just milled, just made into noodles, and just boiled. And even if milling and noodle making may have been beyond possible for Komoro, it realized what it could with serving freshly boiled noodles, and was quickly able to develop a powerful chain throughout Tokyo with shops that so far had been serving pre-boiled noodles having no choice but to switch to this style too.
Something similar happened to ramen shops as well. Having started around 30 years ago, ramen popularity boom initially saw restaurants competing with each other with their soups, now when this has passed a full circle, we see emergence of restaurants trying to beat their competitors by carving out their own unique niches. And making one’s own homemade noodles has come to be considered as something that goes without saying. Moreover, eager to prove that their noodles are made in-house, some restaurants decide to put their noodle machines on an open display for customers to see.

As mentioned above, in only 30 years, the environment surrounding our udon, soba and ramen restaurant industry evolved greatly, and its evolution is accelerating. Once consumers try out something they like, there is no way they would be willing to go back. When we raise the level of consumer's taste, and consumers get used to it, it becomes the industry standard, and those who cannot keep up with the standards will inevitably be left behind.

For noodles, freshness is of paramount importance. This is especially true for soba, where the best noodles are those that were made from freshly milled flour, and served right after being made and boiled. The best udon is also the one that was just made and boiled. Goes without saying that the best ramen is served freshly cooked too.

From the above it can be said that the trend for fresh noodles will become universal for either soba, udon or ramen, but henceforth we are faced with a question of why they should be made in-house using a noodle machine rather than bought from a vendor. Further on I would like to lay down my thoughts from a professional standpoint regarding this issue.

1. In case of udon noodles: It is very difficult to store udon noodles that are high in water content in good condition. Because moisture evaporates, and noodle strands stick to each other, it is necessary to use a lot of dusting powder or reduce the amount of water used to produce them. So we either end up with high water content noodles of inferior texture, or noodles with insufficient level of hydration. Thus, if you want to serve your customers good udon noodles, it is most important to make them in-house yourself.

2. For buckwheat noodles: As was stated above, it became an industry standard to offer fresh noodles cooked in front of customers over 30 years ago even for soba noodles stands. If someone comes up with something that becomes popular with consumers that soon turns into mainstream with other players following the suit. Therefore, pursuit of high quality is even more important for store-type soba restaurants, for which such things as whether they
make noodles in-house or whether they do it by hand are of secondary significance. What really matters for them is whether the noodles they serve taste good or not – which is an issue of survival or going out of business.

③ In case of ramen: When opening a ramen specialty restaurant, it is now being said that an indicator of its success or failure is whether a queue of eager customers is formed at its entrance. In order to achieve that it is not sufficient to rely only on soup, no matter how tasty you may be able to make it, but paying attention to noodles is important too. But just as with udon, there are obvious limits to the quality of noodles supplied by vendors. By sheer nature of their business noodle factories focus mainly on such issues as cost and shelf life leaving out such aspects, important for noodle restaurants, as quality of taste, resistance to boiling water, serving size, use of preservatives, etc.
Chapter 1

Pitfalls of lacking knowledge on noodle making machines
~ Tragedy of people who chose a wrong noodle machine~

In the days when there was no Internet, the only information people planning to open a noodle shop had an access to was what noodle making machine manufacturers or dealerships were giving them.

Because noodle making machines are such a specialized type of equipment, there was little knowledge on selecting a proper one, and people had to make their choice based on limited information gained from such sources as pamphlets from a specific manufacturer, advertisements, workshops, etc. As a result, many customers were ending up with machines that were not up to their expectations, and which they regretted buying.

After Internet became widespread, people began to have more access to various kinds of information regarding noodle machines, but it is still hard to obtain an accurate one. There are very many people who first buy a machine to make their homemade noodles, and only then realize that the choice they made was not the best one, and they begin to regret it. Among other types of kitchen equipment, commercial noodle machines belong to the relatively expensive category. Therefore, even if we make a wrong choice, it is not easy to redo it, even if the usability is bad, or even if there are safety-wise issues, or even if we can’t make good quality noodles we expected we would before buying the machine. In many cases there is no way back.

To prevent this from happening to those who are thinking of using noodle machines, I have summarized the problems one might not realize before starting homemade noodles. Here, I would like to introduce the actual examples of bad choices that actually happened in the past so that everyone can understand the potential problems when selecting noodle making machines in order to avoid them.

1. More often than not noodle machine manufacturers won’t tell you how to make noodles

This applies to manufacturers both in Japan and abroad. Usually, manufacturers of noodle machines know how to make and use machines but do not know how to make delicious noodles. Therefore, if you try to make some new type of noodles, they won’t tell you how – they even can’t.
For example, recently new types of noodles have been developed such as gluten free or low carb noodles, or fragrant noodles made from slightly burned whole wheat flour, but very few manufacturers of noodle machines can catch up with those trends.

Also, although suitability of different types of noodles for different types of soups is important, they have no knowledge about soup at all. Therefore these manufacturers can’t tell you which soup is suitable for which type of noodles.

So, what people who have started making noodles are struggling with is that they don’t know how to make delicious noodles, and manufacturers won’t teach them how to make new types of noodles.

You won’t be able to make good noodles if you only have a noodle machine – no matter what that machine may be – but do not have a proper knowledge based on thorough understanding of how delicious noodles are made.

In general, for manufacturers of noodle machines, their job ends once they've sold their machines. However, for customers who are thinking of starting to make homemade noodles, purchasing a machine is just a beginning of their journey and relationship with the equipment.

There have been countless people who bought noodle machines from companies that could not provide them with noodle making methods. And now they don’t know where to turn for advice for their noodle production needs.

For those who are only beginning to make their own noodles there are many unknowns starting from flour, let alone such more complicated issues as role of protein, amylase content etc.

Average manufacturers of noodle machines are professionals in the field of making noodle machines – but not in making noodles themselves. However in case of Yamato, in addition to organizing noodle cooking schools both in Japan and abroad, we a have sister company, “Sansho”, that actually produces noodles. We also have 8 regional offices across Japan where we conduct noodle-making demos, as well as have schools for udon and soba noodles too.

2. Cases where one selects a machine only because it is cheap

It is a common pattern where one buys a machine as cheaply as possible due to lack of budget but ends up paying a higher price.

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There are many who have selected machines only based on their cheap prices but realized they cannot make delicious noodles, and had to buy high-spec/high-priced machines later, so their first purchase was a waste of time and money. They assume that all noodle machines are the same, and buy the cheapest one. In fact, mechanical structure, design, availability of maintenance – all these factors differ from manufacturer to manufacturer, and people regret learning about it only after they have made a purchase. It is only natural that some types of machines are not designed to make good quality noodles, or have bad usability…

Also there are many instances where as a stopgap measure people buy a cheap machine, or rather a cheap second-hand one, but it turns out to be very difficult to use, and making noodles on it is very cumbersome and time-consuming. But such cases are out of question at all, as no matter how little you may think about quality and taste, at least you should care about production performance and productivity. (Important points on choosing the right noodle machines will be covered in Chapter 2).

3. Cases where one selects a machine without considering after-sale service

There are many people who buy noodle machines based on the manufacturers’ brand names and their first impression, etc. but find out that those manufacturers do not provide any after-service and won’t help in case of a technical trouble.

Generally, manufacturers prioritize sales figures, and once they have sold a unit of equipment, subsequent maintenance/servicing do not bring much money to them.

There are many customers/machine users who experience difficulties because manufacturers of their machines do not provide servicing during holidays, or because their routine servicing is not sufficient, or because they won’t come to customers’ locations easily.

Our company established a year-round maintenance service more than 20 years ago – and while that may be easy to say, it is quite difficult to actually accomplish, because for a company offering such a system costs a lot of resources both in terms of money and its employees’ commitment.

In our case, our maintenance department operates every day, including on Christmas, New Year, or any other holidays.
4. Cases where personnel gets injured using unsafe noodle machines

For manufacturers of noodle machines, the more safety features they introduce to their products – the higher its cost would be. So, if they think only about their sales figures and nothing else, higher prices would make it more difficult for them to sell their products. Also, safety devices lack functionally per se during normal noodle production, but come into play only in case of emergencies.

To put it metaphorically, it is like automatic braking systems that car manufacturers have recently started to install in their cars.

Recently there has been a rise in attention people pay to safety, and car makers started installing automatic safety brakes even onto small cars as well, reducing the cost per unit by taking advantage of production scale.

However, because unlike cars noodle machines are not a mass product you can’t leverage the economy of scale principle to reduce your costs – so the more safety devices you attach onto your machine, the more expensive it becomes, and thus harder to sell.

At the same time, more safety could mean less usability, especially when implemented while simultaneously trying to reduce overall cost of production.

Also, even if it is your intention to furnish your equipment with adequate safety features, customers may occasionally do something unexpected, so you would need to make sure such features are absolutely secure, and there is no way to circumvent them.

5. The machine turned out to be not as durable as expected

Whether machine will be able to function for a long time also depends on the design philosophy of its manufacturer. (See Chapter 2 for reference)

Equipment durability to a very much degree is affected by the engineering aptitude of its designers, as well as the material and quality of the parts it is assembled from.

You may think about it in the same way as you may think about a good food which requires high quality ingredients and highly skilled cook, procuring both of which is inevitably costly. The same logic applies to noodle machines too. With care, some customers who bought our “Shinuchi” udon
machines around when we founded the company have been using them for about 40 years. We still arrange spare parts and maintenance for their machines.

The lifespan of a noodle machine also varies drastically depending on how the machine is routinely cleaned, inspected, maintained, and used.
Column 2
Noodle making machine industry: players and history

The history of noodle machines in Japan began in the early Meiji era (1868-1912), and it has already been over 100 years since people really started using noodle machines. In the early days, few machines were installed inside restaurants but most of them were used in factories. Also, unlike now when hand-making-style machines are widespread, the noodle machines that were prevalent then were of the roller-type variety.

For factory use, roller-type noodle machines are the most widespread even now, and large machines in some cases have production capacity exceeding 10000 portions per hour.

Manufacturers of roller-type noodle machines are divided into manufacturers of large-scale noodle machines (with production capacity over 1000 portions per hour) for factories, and small-scale noodle machines for restaurants (with production capacity of 100 to 500 portions per hour). There is a strong process of natural selection within the industry, and it is estimated that currently there exists around 10 major manufacturers for large- and small-scale types of noodle machines respectively.

A hand-making-style noodle machines were developed in Kagawa prefecture (where Sanuki udon originates from) after World War II. Because roller-type noodle machines aren’t suited to make good quality udon noodles, and because Kagawa was where hand-made udon was very popular, Kagawa became a hotspot for efforts to develop machines that would emulate hand-making techniques.

At its peak, there have been up to 5-6 manufacturers of such machines, but now there are about 3 major players in the field left. Because it requires a complicated design, mechanical automation of hand-making-style is a technically difficult task which was achieved only later, but our company already managed to develop a fully automated hand-making-style machine back in 1979, and now we even have fully automated production lines with manufacturing capacity of about 6000 portions per hour.

Outside Kagawa prefecture, mainly in the Kanto region – in places where noodle food culture has long been popular, there are still several equipment manufacturers for hand-making style noodle machines.
Roller-type noodle machines

Roller-type noodle machines appeared in the early days of the Meiji era, and had more than twice the history of hand-making style noodle machines. The structure of roller-type noodle machines is largely divided into the following three parts:

a) Mixing unit (for mixing flour and water)
b) Rolling unit (for pressing dough mix into a strip of dough sheet, and then rolling it down to a desired thickness)
c) Cutting unit (for cutting thinned down dough sheet width-wise and then length-wise into individual noodle strands)

The most distinctive characteristic of the roller-type noodle machines is that dough is rolled only in one direction, and is generally low in water content which can vary from 25 to around 40 maximum.

Currently roller-type noodle machines are used for production of most types of ramen noodles, and sometimes can be used to make soba noodles as well. Because roller-type noodle machines are good at cutting dough into noodle strands, they are employed to make relatively thin noodles – typically ramen and soba.
In terms of noodle quality, only roll-type noodle machines can make Kyushu-style ramen noodles, which have low hydration and hard texture, while hand-making style noodle machines are ill-fitted to produce such noodles.

As for the direction of future development, it is conceivable that both the roller-type and the hand-making type machines will become more and more computerized, with features of IoT and with Internet connection. Roller-type noodle machines are safe and hygienic even if operated by those without experience. We expect hand-making type noodle machines to be capable of producing noodles of far better quality than it may be possible through manual production.

Further in this booklet, I would like to focus on roller-type noodle machines.
Chapter 2

Important Points on Choosing a Noodle Machine

Noodle machines reflect such features of their respective manufacturers as the particular company’s value system, mission, policies, corporate culture, and design philosophy of its engineers.

In engineering field, a particular intent is called design philosophy.

Various noodle making machines differ depending on a specific design philosophy they were built upon.

However for most people when they hear about a “noodle machine” they imagine that all of them are more or less the same in terms of noodle quality, functionality and usability.

But for a technology professional like me, it is obvious that depending on design philosophy, even if two different noodle machines may look similar from outside, they could be completely different from inside.

1. Importance of manufacturer’s design philosophy when choosing a noodle machine

Design philosophy of various manufacturers differs in terms of which issues they attach their priorities to.
For our company priorities are ranked according to the following order:

1) Noodle deliciousness (highest priority)
2) Safety (high priority)
3) Ease of use (high priority)
4) Design, compactness (high priority)
5) Ease of service (high priority)
6) Durability (high priority)
7) Hygienic qualities (high priority)
8) Conformity to UL and CE standards (high priority)
9) Price
10) Ease of manufacturing
11) Ease of designing
This is a ranking of priorities our R&D department uses as a guidance for its work.

Engineers who are not very skillful in their craft would, for example, tend to give little consideration to such issues like deliciousness of noodles, usability, ease of servicing, safety, but would instead prioritize whether the machine they are developing is easy to design, because in its turn that would make their job easier. As a result, noodle machines designed by such engineers would be very difficult to use and have poor functionality.

On the contrary, outstanding engineers who have deep understanding of how tasty noodles can be made, or what a user-friendly noodle machine is, will make noodle machines that are able to produce tasty noodles, are easy to use, and durable.

Therefore, to be able to design and build noodle machines like these, it is absolutely necessary to continuously raise one’s level of technical expertise and keep building up experience.

The higher the level of designers’ skills, the less attention they would pay to themselves and more to the people who would actually use their machines.

Accordingly, when you consider buying a noodle machine, make sure to thoroughly test it before purchase, especially whether the noodles it can produce are tasty, whether it can be operated with ease, if it is safe to use, durable and hygienic. Compare different models from different manufacturers by trying to use them yourself, and you will be able to understand those aspects easily.

2. Can this noodle machine make the kind of noodles you would want to use in your restaurant?

Ramen noodles are characterized by a great variety of types – from the ones with low water content to ones with high level of hydration, and when considering a noodle machine select the one that is capable of producing the kind of noodles you currently serve in your restaurant or may possibly serve in future. Never compromise on noodle quality.

In Ramen cuisine, there are types of noodles like those served in “le-kei” Ramen shops made using a reverse cutting method (with different than usual proportions of thickness and width) which applies a lot of pressure onto the cutting unit when it has to pass a thick noodle sheet through its narrow grooves. If you plan to serve such noodles make sure to choose a noodle machine that is capable of
producing them.

The example above may perhaps be relatively specific, but if you buy a noodle machine from a manufacturer that is willing to provide you with noodle samples of desired quality before purchase, and recipes after purchase, it is impossible that you would not be able to achieve the quality of noodles you want. Moreover, if you buy a noodle machine from such a manufacturer, you would be able to get new recipes from it in the future.

3. Does this model have enough capacity for your restaurant?

There are many types of noodle machines with different production capacities, and choosing the one that would match your restaurant’s needs and requirements (for example in terms of production volume per day) is important for using your space and resources efficiently.

If it is too large it would take up too much space and consume unreasonably large amounts of electricity, on the other hand, a small one may not have enough production capacity to satisfy your needs.

Choose a noodle machine depending on your required production capacity. For example, suppose you are about to buy a noodle machine with a capacity of 100 portions per hour for a 100-seat restaurant. If the restaurant has few visitors such capacity may suffice, but if it is a popular location you would need to keep making noodles on that machine all day long. So, even if you try to save money on initial investment by buying a smaller machine, considering bigger spending on labor to run it, final cost per portion could turn out to be higher.

It often happens that buying a noodle machine with slightly higher capacity than you initially need turns out to be a more profitable decision long term. Aside from cases when you can allocate a dedicated staff member just for operating a noodle machine, as a general rule try to choose a machine with capacity enough to use it only for 2 – 3 hours a day to produce the required volume of noodles.

Usually, the kind of manufacturers and dealers who only think about selling you a machine may irresponsibly say that this or that can easily be done on it, but when deciding on the type of a noodle machine to buy it would be wise to take into consideration the type and volume of noodles you need for your restaurant.
4. Is it a machine that can be used reliably after purchase?

Natural as it may be, but most people become aware of this important issue only after they have bought and used a machine, not before. Below are important points that would allow you to choose the best noodle machine.

Whether it is a noodle making machine or any other type of equipment, the basic structure is common to all types of machines:

If likened to a human body, a machine has a frame (“bones”), a motor (heart), an operation control part which recently began to include computers (brain), and moving parts (limbs).

When a professional looks at how the machine is built, they can discern the underlying manner of thinking and overall technical level of its manufacturer.

a) Manufacturers that make frames using old designs tend to utilize casting mold materials, wood materials, angle bar materials, but recently designed machines have many steel sheet folding structures and welded components.

b) With regards to a drive system there is a type in which mixer, rollers and cutter are all run by a single motor, and a type which uses dedicated motors for each separate component. With the former, if a motor malfunctions then the whole machine becomes inoperable, but with the latter – even if a motor for rollers fail, mixer and cutter can still be used.

c) Whether control systems for new designs are starting to incorporate more and more computer-based elements, older type machines are controlled with simple switches to turn power supply to their motors ON and OFF (but thermal devices for protection of motors from overheating are absolutely critical).

d) Moving parts come in direct contact with dough so hygiene-wise it is desirable to use stainless steel and plastic for them. For rollers, cast iron material is better to be avoided as it rusts easily.

As mentioned above, noodles machines made by different manufacturers completely differ from each other owing to difference in underlying concepts of their respective manufacturers.

There are all sorts of noodle making machine manufacturers – like those who pay much attention to the issue of cost even to the detriment of safety and usability, or those who try to make their machines as cheap as possible to make them sell better, or those who stubbornly stick to old
designs and mechanisms.

Pricing policies also differ greatly:

There are manufactures which price their equipment very expensively by default, and sell at nearly regular prices to customers who don’t ask for discounts, but heavily cut down prices for those customers who do ask.

On the other hand, there are manufacturers, like our company, which set the most reasonable prices from the beginning, and don’t offer any discounts at all selling fairly for a fair price to all customers without discrimination.

I personally loathe conducting sales talks trying to gage customers, and it is my policy not to offer any discounts.

The most important issues regarding roller-type noodle machines are
   (1) whether they can make delicious noodles
   (2) safety
   (3) usability
   (4) after-sale support by the manufacturer.

We have covered the issue of taste in our previous sections, so let us next move on to the topics of safety, usability, and manufacturer support in their relation to criteria for choosing the best noodle machine.

Pay attention to the following points:

○ Is operation easy? Can it be used even by people who have no professional training?

○ Is safety high? (Especially in case of roller-type noodle machines, whether the machine is equipped with a rollers safety device)

○ Does the machine’s exterior appearance look durable? (is it made of stainless steel?)

○ Is it made of hygienic materials? (the kinds that are easy to clean like stainless steel / plastic)
○ Cant it be carried inside a room even through an opening only several meters wide? (also, can the machine be dismantled during relocation)

○ Can it be used with a household power supply?

○ Does the price change greatly depending on whether you ask for a discount? (or does it change depending on who is a customer?)

○ Is it possible to completely overhaul the old machine?

○ Does the manufacturer offer outstanding support system after purchase? (Can you expect support with regards to equipment, noodle quality, management aspects?)

○ Can the manufacturer be relied on with regards to maintenance? (available all year around regardless of weekday, holidays, etc.)

○ Is the machine’s motor protected from burnout by a thermal device? (does each function have a dedicated motor to run it? – because if the machine has only one motor, once it fails the whole machine becomes inoperable)

In particular, we recommend that you should pay attention if after purchasing a noodle machine its manufacturer can be relied upon in issues of noodle quality and business management.
Column 3
Safety features and hazards

It is absolutely necessary to make sure that the machine you buy is equipped with safety devices. Although this is not widely known among the general public, roller-type noodle machines have a history of causing serious injuries to users in the past.

Recently, stories on litigation cases regarding this problem have been reported on the Internet. The kind of grave injuries we are talking about here are getting one’s hand “crushed” if it gets caught between rollers, or getting fingers cut off by a cutter unit.

Although many terrible accidents are occurring in Japan, these ones are not receiving much attention, and few people are aware of the dangers from the roller-type noodle making machines. Noodle making professionals with 10 or 20 years of experience behind them always pay the utmost attention to this danger.

All Yamato-manufactured roller-type noodle machines are equipped with a safety function that prevents hands from being caught between rollers: raising a safety grid above rollers compartment triggers a special mechanism that immediately stops rollers rotation.

In case of emergency, machine operation can also be momentarily halted with an emergency stop button.

If you consider purchasing a Roller-type noodle machine make sure it has the safety features described above.

This year too we had several customers who purchased noodle machines made by our company after suffering serious injuries from using machines made by other manufactures that did not have the kind of safety features our machines are equipped with. Truth to be told, when they showed me their wounded hands I had no words to describe my feelings.

Also, attention has to be paid to the equipment made by other manufacturers that has no safety features at all, but which can be sold on the market very cheaply.
Chapter 3

Noodle machine buyers speaking out: how to make the right decision!
~ Secrets of people who succeeded in choosing the right model! ~

Many people have failed in selecting the right noodle making machine, but, on the other hand, many did succeed in finding a machine they ended up being happy with. Below I would like to present examples of people who chose the kind of machines that had all the necessary characteristics mentioned above, and quote their testimonies describing why they decided to do it.

Case 1.
Mr. Shuhei, the owner of “Mensenshoubou”, a Ramen shop in Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture

At first I thought that all noodle machine manufacturers were the same. And I think I was lucky that I was blessed with meeting Yamato when I didn’t know anything about noodle machines. And it didn’t take that much time for me to make a decision which machine to buy. I thought that people mattered the most, and I was moved by Yamato employees’ passion which kind of made me buy the machine, because I thought that if a machine was made by such people I didn’t have to worry about it.

Then my business grew, and I bought another machine, and then one more. And now I think that Yamato-made machines are the only machines I should and would buy. But truth to be told, there was one time when I was using a third-party machine that was handed down to me, and I ended up getting two of my staff injured by it.

Then I checked and found out that the other machine was lacking the safety features which
Yamato-made ones had. And that really shocked me.

Before that I was kind of taking the issue of safety for granted thinking it was something that went without saying, but that incident opened my eyes. So now, I can’t imagine using a noodle machine that was not made by Yamato.

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Case 2.

The owner of Udon Workshop “Awaya” from Awajishi City, Hyogo prefecture

I learnt about Yamato Udon School from a friend, and went there.

I had zero previous experience of running a food service business, but at Yamato School I managed to learn everything from making Dashi broth to how to deal with customers. Usually, if an outsider tries to open their own Udon shop they first enter into a decade-long apprenticeship in some other shop where they learn the ropes. So, it’s kind of a world of craftsmanship where once you have learnt enough to open your own shop you are already about 40 or 50 years old.

But my time was too dear to me to wait that long, because I thought that by doing that I would waste too much time before I would be able to contribute to my home region. In this sense, opting for a Yamato-made noodle machine allows one to begin producing delicious Udon noodles right away! No, really! It is owing to my encounter with such a reliable partner like the one that made my noodle machine I was able to get my business started so quickly.
Case 3.
The owner of “Café Nakano-ya” in Machida, Tokyo

I realized my plans for success!

At the beginning I was producing noodles manually, but that way I was making my customers wait for too long, so I switched to using a noodle machine. I did not just switch to buying noodles from a supplier, but to making them myself because I wanted to be sure in quality.

I was searching for a good quality Udon noodle machine from a manufacturer that was really knowledgeable about Udon when I came across the Yamato brand. I tasted some noodles made on a Yamato-manufactured machine, and was astonished – they were so delicious and fragrant that you would not have thought they were made on a machine at all. And I also fell in love with a personality of Mr. Fujii, Yamato’s CEO. I was fascinated by his technically-oriented and logical approach towards the creation of taste.

His approach of not using artificial ingredients, and passion about finding ways to emphasize the original taste of food also fitted into my way of thinking.

When I started making noodles on a machine, I was able to shorten customers’ waiting time in my restaurant, as well as to ensure consistent quality of noodles which may differ when they are made by different people manually (or rather with feet by stomping on dough: because of that there is also a danger of discrepancy from batch to batch depending on the weight of a person). New noodles became very popular among my customers, and in hindsight I think that choosing a Yamato-made machine was a right choice.
Case 4.
The owner of Ramen shop “Kuroki”, Tokyo

I wanted to do something special that would have distinguished me from my competitors, and I was thinking that self-producing noodles could be that thing.

When I was researching about noodle machines I learnt about Yamato. I visited free demonstration events, where I could see that no other brand cared about safety of users as Yamato did. Yamato-made machines can really be trusted! Yamato also provides after-purchase support, and helps with recipe development. They helped me really much.

Case 5.
The owner of “Soba Furukawa” in Takamatsu City, Kagawa prefecture
I was thinking of opening a restaurant that would specialize not only in hand-made Soba, but in Soba cuisine in general. But as it is difficult to do both, I thought that I could start making Soba noodles on a Yamato-made noodle machine.

With Soba flour if you press it too hard, its granules break down, and water saturation during boiling would be uneven which could negatively affect noodle taste and texture. When you make Soba noodles by hand, granules are squeezed out, and that protects them from deformation, but this effect is difficult to achieve using a machine. But Yamato machine was up to the task! Whether it is Soba flour, other food ingredients or anything at all, my personal motto is that before using it you need to check the thing yourself first. And among the noodle machines I checked, I found the one made by Yamato to be the best.

Case 6.
Yoichi from Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

We were struggling to find noodles that would match our soup. This issue was also affecting our sales, and I can remember how we decided to ask for a brochure from Yamato describing their equipment. At the time I was worried if I would be able to make the kind of noodles we wanted on a Richmen-series machine. So I thought that I should go and find out directly, and I went to Kagawa where Yamato’s headquarter is located.

The Yamato-employees who met me were very thorough in their explanation, and made an earnest effort to research into ways to make the kind of noodles we needed.

Once we have started making noodles in-house our sales began to grow, and at the end of this year we opened our third location. We could not only recoup our investment on the noodle machine, but
owing to relatively low cost of homemade noodles, making noodles in-house turned out to be a profitable thing to do as well.

We are extremely thankful to Yamato CEO and all its employees, and would like to remain their customers.

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Case 7.
Torigoshi Noodle Factory from Kagawa prefecture

At Yamato Noodle School we – complete amateurs at the time – were able to learn various things about Udon cuisine starting from the very basics, were able to learn about what Udon noodles are, what they are made from, about noodle quality, as well as various aspects of chemistry using a digital cooking approach, we were also able to make delicious noodles on a noodle machine, and came to a conclusion that noodle machines were something worth considering.

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Case 8.
“Hachinoashiha” from Mie prefecture

We were very worried about starting to self-produce noodles, and contacted many manufacturers, among which Yamato made the best impression on us in terms of how they talked to us, how quick their responses were, and what their corporate culture appeared to be. So, we decided to buy their Richmen-series Type I noodle machine. We were also very pleased that they were ready to help us with our individual requests after we bought the machine.

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Case 9.
Yoshida Noodle Shop from Kanagawa prefecture

Our customers are telling us that our noodles have a punch, and for that we should thank Yamato! We also think that our progress should continue, and when we face any issue we ask Yamato, and they always are extremely helpful by responding in a detailed and easy to understand way. This helps us find answers to all our questions, and customers tell us our noodles are getting even better. We think we were able to choose the right noodle machine.

Case 10.
“Manmentei” from Hiroshima Prefecture

Frankly speaking we had certain misgivings about the noodles we were purchasing from a supplier, and were thinking that it was our duty towards customers that we should not address the issue of
noodle quality half-heartedly. But we knew very little about noodles.

Even after we bought a noodle machine, Yamato was never slow in their responses to our inquiries, and we could tell that they are very knowledgeable about noodles. They even helped us with noodle making know-hows. Owing to that even our colleagues from other restaurants have begun asking us for advice.

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Case 11.
“Hyakumanbariki” from Shiga prefecture

Compared to how it was before, we now have 70% more customers. Even people from other Ramen shops ask us what kind of business model we have (laughing). Other Ramen shops are in the slump with lackluster sales, but we keep making profits, and this year our sales are 126% up compared to the last.

We have drastically changed once we started doing business with Yamato. Customer after customer keeps praising our noodles, and we even made “Zaru-Chuka” variety – the one where noodle quality matters very much – to be a constant part of our menu all year around, instead of offering it only during the Summer season. And now it is frequently ordered even in winter.

When we were in the process of choosing which noodle machine to buy we were thinking of buying the one with a 5 kg mixer unit, but Yamato staff advised us to opt for a 10-kg type – and we are very glad we followed their advice. My wife told me it was my best purchase ever! (laughing)
Column 4
Misconceptions of people who do not make homemade noodles, and know little about noodle machines

Do you by chance happen to have any of the following misconceptions about noodle machines?

If you do, hurry up, and contact our company ASAP!

○ People who don’t know about homemade noodles won’t be able to make good-quality noodles even if they buy a noodle machine

○ Noodle machines are dangerous, and can injure users

○ Noodle machines are too loud, and owing one would cause complaints about noise from neighbors

○ Noodle machines are too bulky and heavy, and it is impossible to bring one upstairs

○ You would need a dedicated noodle making room to install and use a noodle machine

○ Using a noodle making machine is a complicated task not everyone can be trained to do, and only men can use it

○ Operation of a noodle machine is difficult, and requires a dedicated staff for it

○ Noodle machines are to be used only by a restaurant owner or someone with a special knowledge

○ If a noodle machine breaks you would not be able to make noodles, and would have to close your restaurant

○ Noodle machines easily break down, and are impossible to be fixed by users, and repairing them is very costly

○ Noodle machines are difficult to clean, and cleaning them is very time-consuming

○ Noodle machines are big and consume a lot of electricity

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○ Noodle machines are dangerous, and can be used only by a specially trained staff

○ Noodle machines are unreliable, and using them is risky

○ If a noodle machine malfunctions it is difficult to get technical support for it

○ Instead of making noodles yourself you should leave noodle making to professionals

○ Noodle machines are expensive; homemade noodles would be more expensive than those bought from a supplier

○ Hand-made noodles are unconditionally better than machine-made

○ Customers won’t come if they are served machine-made noodles

○ You will not be able to replicate the noodles you currently serve after switching to machine-made noodles, and that would alienate your customers

○ Developing new recipes is difficult, and it is impossible to do it yourself

○ Machine-made Udon or Soba noodles would not be as tasty as hand-made

○ The only way to make pasta noodles is by extrusion

○ For each type of noodles you would need to have a specialized type of noodle machine (i.e. Ramen machine for Ramen, Udon machine for Udon, Soba machine for Soba)
Conclusion

Deliciousness has a power to improve customer satisfaction and make customers come to your place again!

Were you able to learn any new information about noodle machines by reading this booklet?
Perhaps, you could learn something new about noodle machines that you did not know before.

Up until now, noodle-making machines have been the unsung heroes of the noodle food service world, toiling behind closed doors of restaurants’ backrooms, but their position is gradually changing.

High level of competition in the food service industry leads to a natural selection among players, and in such circumstances noodle making machines are being brought into the limelight gaining prominence on the front stage.

Noodle machines are also assuming symbolic roles of restaurants’ commitment to serving fresh and tasty products to their customers.

In the future, noodle machines may also be required to perform additional functions, which would contribute to their further evolution. However, no matter how far the food industry in general and noodle machines in particular will progress, one thing will remain the same, and that is “Deliciousness has a power to improve customer satisfaction and make customers come to your place again!”

So far in this booklet I have touched upon criteria for choosing a right noodle machine, but here, at the end of it, I would like to add a few words to address this universal truth.

There are many issues of great importance when it comes to choosing a noodle machine, but among them the most important one is to ask yourself what is the ultimate purpose you buy it for.

Using a high-performance noodle machine allows you to produce delicious noodles cheaply and in large quantities, which in its turn serves as a way to make your restaurant prosperous. To answer a question of why the most essential factor for a noodle machine is the ability to produce tasty noodles we need to point out that a noodle machine is an important key for success of your business.
Deliciousness is not only for business owner’s self-contentment but it is the most powerful weapon for gaining customers too.

It is for this reason the pursuit of deliciousness is a matter of paramount priority for food service industry. Please do not forget this.
Thank you for reading this booklet to the end. I hope this will help you with choosing the right noodle machine, and make your business prosper.

Should you have additional questions about noodle machines do not hesitate to contact the author. Greatly looking forward to hearing from my readers. Thank you.

By Rocky Fujii,
Udon, Soba, Ramen restaurant prosperity advisor
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