Appliance Service- A Two-Sided Story

Mary S. Pickett
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/farmscience

Part of the Agriculture Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/farmscience/vol15/iss8/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa Agricultural and Home Economics Experiment Station Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Iowa Farm Science by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Why are service costs so high? What can you do about them? Generally, you should expect to pay for what you receive, but you also should expect to receive what you do pay for. Here are some things to consider.

by Mary S. Pickett

"I PRACTICALLY maintain a serviceman to keep my appliances working." "If people would only use their appliances correctly, they wouldn't break down so much." "Service charges are outrageous!" "My business loses money on its service department. People think they should get service for nothing." "It took weeks to get my washer repaired, and with a baby..." "If people would call us when troubles are small, serious breakdowns could be avoided."

It's easy to see who's talking, and both are at least partly right. We can't ignore the service problem. It's with us. The world we live in is becoming more complex, and the tools we use to meet the needs of our everyday life have taken on the same character. Our choices are few: retreat to the old way or meet the challenge of servicing more complex equipment.

It's a two-sided story. Understanding both sides is essential to a better working relationship between those of us who have the appliances and those who service them. Both homemakers and servicemen wish a satisfactory solution to the problem. Let's look at some of the concerns both should have in mind.

Is It Necessary?

Each automatic appliance that serves us bears a load and undergoes normal wear and tear. Parts become loosened and worn. Oil may need to be replaced. The amount of wear varies with the amount and kind of use, the appliance and the complexity of its design.

Automatic washers and dryers, for example, aren't and probably can't be as service free as manually operated ones. There are timers, thermostats, valves, motors, humidistats and other delicate controls and safety devices. They add up to at least 10 times the number of working parts found on the older and simpler machines. As the number of working parts increases, the chances of needing repairs mount accordingly. Also, each of the functional parts must be kept in accurate adjustment for satisfactory operations.

Do we, then, want these appliances that bring us additional satisfactions and conveniences as well as increased service problems? Sales records say, "Yes!"

How, then, can we get the most for our money? First, by recognizing that, with the purchase, comes the challenge of making the most effective use of the appliance and taking care of it. Care includes servicing at appropriate times or providing for periodic checkups.

Servicing today's appliances requires well-trained people. In the old days, the neighborhood mechanic could tackle the washing machine and get it to run again—just as the drivers of Model T's could often make their own repairs. But how many husbands of today attempt to adjust their power brakes, power steering or automatic shifts?

The cars of today have grown much too complicated for untrained home servicing. Regular checkups are part of the routine of owning a car. Car owners realize this fact and accept it as a part of owning the car and protecting their investment. Do we as homemakers have the same point of view toward our household appliances? Automatic appliances also need servicing by
trained technicians with the proper tools for testing, checking, and replacement. Inexpert tampering can cause serious damage.

What About Cost?

Why do service and repairs cost so much? There are a number of reasons. Here are some of them:

—Appliance servicing requires highly skilled people, and the pay scale has gone up.

—We expect the serviceman to keep up-to-date and to know about our particular appliances. To do so, he must take time from earning to attend training schools and to study.

—Many appliance repairs are done in the home. The serviceman must keep and carry with him a sizable stock of parts and tools to meet needs.

—The time required to do an effective repair job is increased as restricted space and other limitations in the home hamper the serviceman.

—Service costs generally aren’t included in the retail price. Whenever we seek the lowest price or a discount, we disregard the idea of servicing. Then, when the need for servicing arises, we’re often in the peculiar position of wanting what we haven’t paid for.

What Can You Do?

For anyone buying an appliance, the initial cost, of course, is a primary concern. But, depending on the appliance, there are other factors to consider, too, which may or may not be offset by any initial savings. Some future servicing probably is inevitable. What can you do to minimize future service needs and costs? Along with initial costs, consider also the following:

Purchase a brand whose manufacturer protects you through the agreement known as a warranty. A warranty is the manufacturer’s written acknowledgement of responsibility for the replacement of parts that are defective or fail within a specified time period.

Refrigerators, freezers, room air conditioners and dehumidifiers all carry a manufacturer’s 1-year warranty. The sealed refrigerating mechanism generally is covered for an additional 4 years by a manufacturer’s replacement contract. Electric ranges and automatic washers carry a 1-year manufacturer’s warranty on all parts. In some cases, there’s an additional 4-year warranty on the transmission of a washer.

Some, but not all, manufacturers’ franchise agreements with their dealers require the dealers to provide free labor to the customer during the 1-year warranty period. If damage to parts is due to obvious misuse by the customer, it seems equally obvious that the manufacturer shouldn’t be held responsible. But in many cases, the manufacturer accepts such charges during the warranty period nevertheless.

Check on the labor costs. These aren’t always covered by the warranty, so make sure of an understanding with the dealer at the time of purchase. This often is the crux of the entire problem.

Select a reliable dealer. Is he (or the firm) the type whose code of ethics is beyond reproach? Does he seem sincerely interested in you and your lasting satisfactions with the appliance? Does he offer to give you an honest, factual presentation of the workings of the appliance? Does he have a well-trained service department—not just a parts changer? If you can answer yes to these questions, you’re fortunate.

It will be worth your while to look for such a dealer. It will pay off both at the time of purchase and later on. Remember, though, that the dealer or his serviceman can’t give time, labor and energy for nothing. In all fairness, we should expect to pay for what we receive.

Select an appliance of good design and workmanship. Long life should be built into the appliance. Operation should be as foolproof as possible, and servicing should be as simple as possible. Check on these points.

Know what you need and what you want. Be prepared to ask intelligent questions. Service begins with the sale itself.

Check on delivery and installation of major appliances. Carelessness here often is the root of later dissatisfaction. Complicated installations should be made by one who knows the appliance.

Look for a well-trained service person. This isn’t easy. The men best qualified often find they can make far more money in other lines with better working conditions. And a poorly trained repairman, whose time may come “cheap,” may prove more expensive than one who is well trained.

Study the use and care manuals. Look them over before you buy. Can you find the answers to your questions easily? Is the information organized and clearly explained for later reference?

Read and follow the manufacturer’s instructions. This will help you use rather than abuse your appliances.

Insist on a thorough demonstration at the time of sale or installation and before you use the appliance. Don’t wait for the serviceman to have to demonstrate and explain proper use; his time is valuable, and you pay for it.

Plan to be at home when the serviceman arrives, even though he may not be able to get there right on the dot. Time to make calls varies, depending a lot on the repairs he finds necessary. Sometimes a set schedule is impossible. But if you’re there, he may be able to explain the appliance problem so that you can avoid it in the future.

You can avoid many of today’s service problems (1) by buying from reputable dealers who properly advertise, sell, demonstrate and install well-designed appliances and (2) by reading and following instructions to insure proper use and care. At the same time you can refuse to buy shoddy appliances or from dealers or firms who don’t provide satisfactory sales and service. Expect, in other words, to pay for what you receive but, at the same time, insist on receiving what you do pay for.