

The coffee's on us

Companies are installing espresso machines to keep staff out of cafe queues and on the job



Time saver: Norma Needham, owner of Hawkesbury Valley Holders, has installed an office coffee machine for her staff

Picture: Frank Viola

By MIAWLING LAM

THE humble cappuccino has joined the cigarette and the Internet as the latest threat to workplace productivity.

Coffee runs have become the new smoko and businesses have become so fed up with workers leaving their desks in search of a caffeine fix that many are now paying for professional coffee machines to be installed on-site.

Shelling out \$6000 for an espresso machine is worth it because it keeps employees in the building, keeps them motivated and cuts down on break time, employers argue.

Mitsubishi Sydney City, Hawkesbury Valley Holden, Babcock & Brown, global business and technology services company EDS and international shipping firm Maersk are among leading firms that have recently bought coffee machines for staff.

Adam Symon is the director at Bravo Repair Centre and maintains and fixes hundreds of machines each week.

"We've really noticed that, percentage wise, the number of companies who are dealing with machines has tripled over the last six months," he said.

"A lot of money is being spent on these coffee machines. The more serious companies are even getting them plumbed into the water system."

Mr Symon estimates that in a standard office of 300 staff, workers were grinding their way through 15kg of coffee beans each week, enough to make around 1800 standard cups.

He adds that considering the time lost when staff walk to the cafe, line up and wait for their individual brews to be made, the initial outlay on machines for companies is next to nothing.

"Over the life of the machine, it pays for itself in terms of productivity and staff happiness," he said.

"It's a major thing for staff to be able to come in to work and grab their coffee in the morning. They tend to be more relaxed and get stuck into their work more."

A 2006 study conducted by human resources firm Talent2 found coffee drinkers were costing Australian businesses more than \$1.8 billion in lost productivity each year.

Of the 709 surveyed, more than half estimated each trip to the barista took less than 10 minutes, while seven per cent said it took 20 minutes or more.

Marion Levitt, director of Nimue Skin Technology, says she bought a Saeco Magic De Luxe coffee machine, valued at \$999, for her 14 workers late last year.

Although she admits it was primarily bought to save her employees money, she has now noticed that nobody leaves the office unless it's their lunch break.

"We had a coffee van that used to come around and everybody would leave at once to go down," she said.

"It would end up being a 15- to 30-minute procedure because the queue was that long. Now with the machine, everybody's using it and it creates a sense of togetherness."



Together: Marion Levitt with her staff