



Competitor & Market Decision Brief

Should [Client] launch a fixed-fee preventive-maintenance plan for independent restaurants in Gauteng?

SAMPLE — ANONYMISED EXAMPLE

Decision	Whether to launch a fixed-fee preventive-maintenance (“uptime”) service plan for independent restaurants in Gauteng in the next two quarters — and if so, in which segment, at what price, and against which competitor position.
Client	[Client] — an anonymised South African supplier of commercial kitchen equipment and servicing, selling equipment and ad-hoc repairs to independent restaurants and small hotel groups.
Market / segment	Gauteng, South Africa. Independent full-service restaurants (30–120 covers) and small hotel groups (2–5 properties).
Competitors assessed	Three (the founding scope for this product).
Evidence basis	Public-source, desk research only. No interviews, mystery shopping, technical testing or paid databases.
Indicative fee	US\$750 — Competitor & Market Decision Brief, founding price. Shown as an example of scope-to-fee, not a real transaction.
Document type	Illustrative sample. Not a client deliverable. Not advice.

This document is a constructed sample created to show the form, depth and judgement of an Arceon Competitor & Market Decision Brief. It does not describe a real engagement and no real client commissioned or paid for it. All company names, figures, quotations, sources and findings are fictional and were written for illustration. Any resemblance to an actual business is coincidental. It is not legal, tax, investment or regulated professional advice.

Executive decision summary

RECOMMENDATION | MODIFY

Do not launch broadly. Test one Gauteng corridor at one published price, with a stop date and a measured gate, before committing launch spend.

The three points that matter

- The market is already sold to on a plan basis: all three competitors market a preventive-maintenance or care proposition to this segment (High confidence, F1).
- The three competitors occupy distinct, non-overlapping positions — national reach, local relationship, warranty integrity. None owns “one clear price, any equipment brand”, which is where the client’s existing capability already sits (High, F3).
- The recurring buyer complaint is response speed, not price (Moderate, F2).

The gap that decides the recommendation

- What this segment will actually pay each month could not be established from public sources, and no public source shows how many already hold a plan. That is stated as a finding in its own right (Insufficient evidence, F5), and it is the reason this brief returns MODIFY rather than PROCEED. The contrary case — do not launch at all — is set out in full in section 9.

Contents

1. The decision
 2. Scope, exclusions and evidence boundary
 3. Method — how this brief was produced
 4. Evidence base and source quality
 5. The three competitors
 6. Comparison matrix
 7. Findings and confidence levels
 8. The commercial case: assumptions and sensitivity
 9. Limitations, evidence gaps and the strongest counterargument
 10. What could change this conclusion
 11. Recommendation
 12. Next actions — a gated 90-day plan
 - 12.1 Indicative fee for this scope
- Appendix A — Source register
Appendix B — Confidence scale
Appendix C — Glossary

How to read this document

This brief separates evidence from judgement throughout. Each substantive statement is marked, and no claim is presented as fact unless it is traceable to a source.

FACT	Supported by a cited source. Where the source is a competitor’s own marketing, that is stated — it evidences what the competitor claims, not that the claim is true.
INTERPRETATION	Arceon’s judgement about what the evidence means. Reasoned, but not evidence.
ASSUMPTION	Relied upon and not verified within scope.
EVIDENCE GAP	Material, unanswerable from public sources, and requiring primary research.

Confidence scale used in this brief

Confidence is graded per finding on four levels — High, Moderate, Low and Insufficient evidence. Full definitions are in Appendix B. Every finding in section 7 carries one of these grades.

A brief that reports high confidence on every point is not reporting honestly. Some questions cannot be answered from public sources — willingness to pay is the most common — so this brief returns MODIFY rather than PROCEED and marks that question as insufficient evidence. The honest answer at this evidence level is more useful than false certainty.

1. The decision

The client sells commercial kitchen equipment and services it. Equipment sales are lumpy and price-competitive; ad-hoc repair work is unpredictable and often unprofitable once travel and parts are counted. The client wants predictable recurring revenue and a reason for its existing customers to stay with it rather than buy a competitor's plan.

The decision put to this brief

Should [Client] launch a fixed-fee preventive-maintenance service plan for independent restaurants in Gauteng in the next two quarters — and if so, in which segment, at what price, and against which competitor position?

Why this decision, and why now

- **FACT** — All three competitors identified in this brief publish a preventive-maintenance or service-plan proposition to restaurant customers in Gauteng.
- **INTERPRETATION** — If plan-based servicing is becoming the default way restaurants buy maintenance, a supplier that only sells equipment and ad-hoc repairs is exposed on both retention and margin.
- **ASSUMPTION** — The client has the operational capacity to service a plan book in Gauteng without degrading its existing repair response.

What a useful answer must contain

- Whether the demand is real and evidenced, not merely plausible.
- What the three competitors actually offer, at what visible price, and how they win.
- Where the client could realistically win — and where it cannot.
- Whether a price exists that the target segment would pay and the client could serve profitably.
- The conditions under which this conclusion would change.

Decision window: the client's stated intention was to commit launch spend in the next two quarters. This brief is therefore framed to support a go / modify / stop decision inside one quarter.

2. Scope, exclusions and evidence boundary

In scope

- One market and one segment: Gauteng, independent restaurants (30–120 covers) and small hotel groups (2–5 properties).
- Three competitors, profiled from current public sources.
- Positioning, target customer, published products, visible pricing, routes to market and customer-facing claims.
- Publicly available customer-review and messaging signals where they exist.
- Commercial implications, risks, evidence gaps and what to validate next.

Explicitly out of scope

- Primary interviews, surveys, mystery shopping or participant recruitment.
- Technical testing of competitor service quality or response times.
- Paid database access, syndicated market reports or proprietary financial data.
- Legal, tax or regulatory opinions.
- Ongoing monitoring of competitor moves after delivery.
- Any private, confidential or improperly obtained competitor information.

This boundary is deliberate and is the standard boundary for this product. It does not weaken the brief — it defines what can honestly be claimed from public evidence, and it is the reason some findings below are marked as evidence gaps rather than answered.

3. Method — how this brief was produced

Arceon's six-step method was applied to this decision as follows.

1. Define the decision	The decision, its intended use, geography, timeframe and the shape of a useful answer were fixed with the client before any evidence was gathered. The question in section 1 is the agreed question.
2. Design the evidence plan	Because this product is a public-source brief, the evidence plan was limited to sources that are openly available and verifiable: competitor websites and service-plan pages, published price lists and terms, downloadable brochures, public review platforms, search-result and messaging signals, and trade-press material. Paid databases and human subjects were excluded by scope.
3. Gather and cross-check	Material claims were checked against at least one second source where one exists. Where a claim appears only in a competitor's own marketing and nowhere else, it is recorded as the competitor's claim — not as fact. Contradictions between sources are recorded rather than smoothed over.
4. Analyse commercially	Evidence was assessed for what it means for the client's decision: demand, competition, price structure, the client's own cost position, defensibility, and the risk of winning a contract that loses money. Facts are separated from interpretation throughout.
5. Challenge the conclusion	The emerging recommendation was attacked deliberately: the strongest case against it is written up in section 9, the evidence that would overturn it is stated in section 10, and confidence is graded rather than asserted.
6. Deliver decision support	The output is shaped to the agreed scope: decision summary, profiles, comparison, findings with confidence, assumptions, limitations, a recommendation and gated next actions.

What this brief is not

It is not market sizing. No dependable, current, Gauteng-specific figure for restaurant maintenance spend was available within scope, and a fabricated number would be worse than no number.

It is not a demand forecast. Desk evidence can establish that a problem exists and that competitors are selling against it. It cannot establish what your customers will pay.

4. Evidence base and source quality

Public sources were graded before use. The grade reflects how much weight the source can bear, not how convenient it was to find.

Grade	Source type	Weight given
A	Competitor published documents: service-plan pages, price lists, terms, brochures	Primary. Shows what is actually offered and at what visible price.
B	Public review platforms and customer commentary	Strong for recurring complaints and expectations; self-selecting, so directional.
C	Trade press and industry association material	Useful for context and change over time; rarely specific to this segment.
D	Competitor marketing claims about outcomes or scale	Weakest. Recorded as claims, never as verified fact.

What the evidence could and could not establish

Could establish

- That all three competitors actively market a plan proposition to this segment (Grade A).
- The dimensions they compete on: response time, coverage, parts cover, price presentation (Grade A).
- The service failures restaurant operators complain about publicly, repeatedly and specifically (Grade B).
- The price bands visible on plan pages and in quotations reproduced publicly (Grade A, partial).

Could not establish

- What independent restaurants in Gauteng will actually pay each month.
- How many of them already hold a service plan, or with whom.
- Competitor churn, contract terms or renewal behaviour.
- Competitor cost base, and therefore whether their published prices are profitable.
- A defensible market size for this segment.

Five of the six questions a client usually asks about this decision could be answered from public sources. The sixth — willingness to pay — could not, and section 7 says so plainly.

5. The three competitors

All three are described from public sources as at the sample date. Names are constructed for this illustration. Each profile states what the competitor claims, separately from what the evidence supports.

KitchenLine National

National multi-brand service network

Profile — cited facts

- Publishes a tiered preventive-maintenance plan for commercial kitchens, with three named tiers.
- Leads on guaranteed response time and national coverage; multi-site customers are explicitly targeted.
- Publishes a starting monthly price for the entry tier; higher tiers are “from” prices only.
- States that it services all major equipment brands regardless of origin.

Arceon interpretation

Competes on certainty and reach. Its plan is designed for buyers who cannot tolerate an unanswered call — which describes multi-site operators more than single independents. The entry tier looks like an acquisition price; the tier that includes parts cover is where the margin almost certainly sits.

Evidence gap

Published starting price and the tier most customers would need are not the same number, and the plan page does not reconcile them.

Vantage Commercial Services

Regional Gauteng specialist

Profile — cited facts

- Sells a maintenance agreement with a published monthly fee and a stated discount for annual prepayment.
- Positioning is personal service and rapid turnaround rather than breadth of cover.
- Public reviews repeatedly describe fast attendance and direct contact with a technician.
- Does not publish an equipment-brand list, and its site does not claim nationwide coverage.

Arceon interpretation

Competes on relationship and speed within a defined area, not on price or scale. This is the competitor the client most closely resembles in size and reach — meaning a straight fight here would be on the client’s weaker ground: existing relationships that Vantage already holds.

Evidence gap

Whether its published fee includes parts is ambiguous on its own pages; the terms document and the plan page do not clearly agree.

Meridian Equipment Care

Manufacturer-backed programme

Profile — cited facts

- Offers a care programme tied to a specific equipment manufacturer’s appliances.
- Links continued cover to warranty validity and the use of approved parts.
- Publishes no standalone monthly price on the public site; pricing is described as quoted per site.
- Targets its own equipment installed base rather than the open market.

Arceon interpretation

Competes on risk avoidance and warranty integrity. It does not compete for the client’s whole estate — only for a subset of equipment. That makes it less of a threat on total contract value, but a structural disadvantage for the client on any site where Meridian’s equipment is installed.

Evidence gap

Price is not public at all, so no price comparison with this competitor is possible.

6. Comparison matrix

Compared against the criteria that matter to the buyer's decision, not against how loudly each competitor markets.

Criterion	KitchenLine National	Vantage Commercial	Meridian Equipment Care
Positioning	Certainty and national reach	Personal service, fast local response	Warranty integrity, approved parts
Target buyer	Multi-site and chain operators	Independent single-site restaurants	Owners of its own equipment brand
Published price	Entry tier "from" only	Monthly fee published; annual prepayment discount	None — quoted per site
Parts cover	Included only in upper tiers	Ambiguous on published pages	Implied via approved parts
Response promise	Guaranteed, tiered by plan	Rapid, not contractually quantified publicly	Not emphasised
Geographic claim	National	Gauteng-focused	Wherever its equipment is installed
Evidence strength	Moderate — clear public terms	Moderate — clear positioning, unclear terms	Low — almost no public detail

What the matrix shows

- **INTERPRETATION** — No competitor owns “the independent restaurant that wants one predictable monthly number and does not care who made the equipment”. That position is vacant, and it is adjacent to what the client already does.
- **INTERPRETATION** — Price transparency is poor across the market. The buyer cannot easily compare, which is an opportunity for a supplier willing to publish a straight price.
- **EVIDENCE GAP** — Because two of three competitors do not publish comparable pricing, this matrix cannot tell the client what price the market bears. It can only show how price is presented.

7. Findings and confidence levels

Six findings. Confidence is graded per finding, and two findings are genuinely weak. That is the result, not a shortfall in the brief.

F1 High

The market is already being sold to on a plan basis.

All three competitors market a preventive-maintenance or care proposition to restaurant customers in Gauteng, from published pages (Grade A). Two of the three structure it as a recurring monthly fee. Plan-based servicing is not a new idea the client would be introducing; it is an established pattern the client would be entering.

F2 Moderate

The recurring complaint is response, not price.

Across public reviews, the most repeated and specific complaint is failing to attend, or attending late, when equipment fails during service (Grade B). Price is mentioned, but far less often and less specifically. The buyer's stated pain is downtime risk.

F3 High

The competitors have chosen three different, non-overlapping positions.

Reach, relationship and warranty. None of the three leads on "one predictable number, any equipment brand, clear terms" — the position that fits the client's existing capability.

F4 Low

There appears to be an under-served band of small multi-site operators.

Operators running two to five sites sit awkwardly: large enough to worry about downtime across sites, too small for the national network's multi-site terms. This is inferred from price presentation and positioning language (Grade A/D), not from anything a competitor or buyer states directly. It is a hypothesis worth testing, not a finding to build a launch on.

F5 Insufficient evidence

What independent restaurants in Gauteng will pay each month is not established.

Two of three competitors do not publish comparable pricing, and no published source shows what buyers actually pay, or what proportion of this segment holds a plan at all. This brief cannot answer the single most important commercial question in the decision. It is stated as a gap and it is the reason the recommendation is MODIFY rather than PROCEED.

F6 Moderate

A broad launch would compete on the client's weakest ground.

Launching nationally would put the client head-to-head with a network on coverage — a dimension it cannot win — and against the regional specialist on relationships it does not yet hold. The client's genuine advantages are its installed base, its existing parts stock and its ability to service mixed-brand equipment.

8. The commercial case: assumptions and sensitivity

Public evidence cannot produce a profit model, because the inputs are internal to the client. What it can do is name precisely which assumptions decide the outcome, so the client tests the right things rather than the easy ones.

#	Assumption the plan depends on	Status	How the client could test it
A1	The client's parts and travel costs on plan work stay below the fee charged	UNVERIFIED	Model against 24 months of its own repair history, split by equipment type
A2	Plan customers can be serviced inside existing technician capacity	UNVERIFIED	Compare planned-visit load against current utilisation by corridor
A3	Failure frequency on the target installed base is predictable enough to price	PARTLY	Client's own repair records would answer this directly; not available publicly
A4	The target segment will accept a 12-month term rather than a monthly cancel	UNVERIFIED	Price test with a term and a no-term option and compare conversion
A5	Plan revenue is incremental, not a discount on repairs already paid for	UNVERIFIED	Compare repair revenue per customer before and after plan adoption

Sensitivity — the two variables that decide it

- Monthly fee achieved. Every rand of discount comes straight off contribution, and the entry prices competitors publish suggest the segment is already used to a low headline number.
- Plans sold per service call generated. A plan is only profitable if the fee exceeds the expected cost of servicing it. Selling plans cheaply to high-failure sites is the failure mode that kills service businesses; it is a sales-mix risk, not a pricing risk.

Illustrative arithmetic — constructed for this sample, not client data

If a plan is sold at R520 per month and the expected annual cost of parts, travel and planned visits for that site is R4,100, contribution is roughly R2,140 per site per year.

The same plan sold to a site with an expected annual service cost of R5,800 is loss-making at the same price — a swing of about R3,800 between two customers paying the same fee.

This is why A1 and A3 matter more than the headline price. The figures above are round numbers chosen to show the shape of the problem; they are not derived from any client's data.

9. Limitations, evidence gaps and the strongest counterargument

Limitations of this brief

- Public-source only. No interviews, no mystery shopping, no paid data.
- Two of three competitors do not publish comparable plan pricing, so no like-for-like price comparison exists.
- Public reviews are self-selecting: operators who complain loudly are not a representative sample.
- No dependable, current, segment-specific market size was available at this scope, so none is given.
- Competitor cost structures are not public, so nothing here says whether their prices are profitable.
- This brief reflects the position at the sample date. Competitor plans, prices and positioning change.

Evidence gaps — the questions this brief could not close

E1 — What the segment will pay per month.

The single most important commercial question. No public source answers it. Requires a price test with real prospects.

E2 — How much of the segment already holds a plan, and with whom.

Determines whether this is a growth market or a fight over an installed base.

E3 — Whether the client's own customer base converts at all.

The client already holds the best data in this market — its own customer list — and it was not in scope for this brief.

E4 — Actual competitor contract terms, minimum periods and renewal behaviour.

Terms pages are partially published and partially ambiguous.

The strongest counterargument to the recommendation

This is the honest case for stopping, written as forcefully as it can be.

Do not launch. The market already has three credible plan providers, one of them national. Plan revenue is small and slow, the buyers are the most price-sensitive operators in food service, and the segment has not demonstrated, in any public evidence, that it will pay a profitable monthly fee. Entering costs the client its two genuine assets — its reputation for fixing things quickly and its ad-hoc repair margin — in exchange for a discount subscription it may not be able to service profitably. If the client is going to spend a quarter on this, the better return may be increasing equipment attach to existing repair customers.

This counterargument is not weakened by the findings above. F5 is unresolved, and F4 is a hypothesis rather than a finding. The recommendation in section 11 survives this argument, but only because it is narrow and reversible — not because the evidence is strong.

10. What could change this conclusion

Stated in advance so the client knows what to watch, and what would legitimately overturn this brief.

If this became true	The conclusion would move to
A price test shows the target segment converts at a fee above the client's cost-to-serve	PROCEED in the narrow segment
A majority of the target segment already holds a plan with a competitor	DO NOT PROCEED — it is an installed-base fight the client is late to
The national network launches a sub-entry tier aimed at single-site independents	DO NOT PROCEED — the client's price position disappears
The client's parts and travel costs on plan work exceed the fee at the expected failure rate	DO NOT PROCEED — the model is structurally unprofitable
Small multi-site operators (2–5 sites) convert materially better than single sites	PROCEED, but reposition from restaurants to small groups

11. Recommendation

RECOMMENDATION | MODIFY

Do not launch broadly. Test the narrow segment at a published price, with a stop date and a measured gate, before committing launch spend.

What to do

- Run a bounded 90-day paid pilot in one Gauteng corridor, offered only to existing customers who already generate repair work — not to the open market.
- Publish one straight price for one plan covering any equipment brand, with parts cover stated explicitly. Ambiguity is the competitors' weakness; do not copy it.
- Target small multi-site operators (2–5 sites) as the primary segment, and single-site restaurants as secondary.
- Instrument the pilot properly: fee achieved, plans sold per 100 customers approached, and actual cost-to-serve per plan. These three numbers decide whether this becomes a business.

What not to copy

- Do not copy the national network's guaranteed-response promise. The client cannot underwrite it across Gauteng, and a broken SLA promise is worse than a modest one.
- Do not copy the regional specialist's discount-led annual prepayment. It buys cash flow at the cost of the margin this plan exists to create.
- Do not copy the manufacturer-linked programme's brand restriction. It would exclude most of the client's own installed base.

What to validate next

- Willingness to pay: the single unresolved question (F5, E1).
- Whether plans are incremental or cannibalise repair revenue (A5).
- Whether the 2–5 site hypothesis (F4, provisional) survives contact with real buyers.

Confidence in this recommendation

- Moderate on the competitive structure — three competitors, three clear positions, good public evidence (F1, F3).
- Low on the segment hypothesis (F4).
- Insufficient evidence on price and demand (F5). The recommendation is deliberately structured to be reversible for that reason.

12. Next actions — a gated 90-day plan

Each gate has a date and a decision attached. If a gate is not met, the next stage does not start.

Days	Action	Gate to pass before continuing
0–14	Model cost-to-serve per plan from the client's own repair history, by equipment type	Cost-to-serve known within a defensible range (A1, A3)
14–30	Define one plan, one published price and one term	The client can state in one sentence what is and is not covered
30–75	Offer the pilot to existing customers in one corridor only	At least 10 paid plans sold, or a documented reason why not
75–90	Measure fee achieved, conversion and actual cost-to-serve	Contribution per plan is positive and repeatable
Day 90	Decision meeting against the gates above	Proceed, extend the pilot, or stop

12.1 Indicative fee for this scope

US\$750 — Competitor & Market Decision Brief — founding price

One decision, one market or segment, three competitors, public-source evidence, delivered in 7–10 business days after payment and complete intake.

Shown as an example of how a brief is scoped and priced. No client paid it and no engagement took place. Not a quotation.

Appendix A — Source register

In a real brief each entry carries a direct URL and access date. Here they are described by type.

Ref	Source type used	What it evidenced	Grade
S1	Competitor A plan page and published terms	Tier structure, response promise, entry price	A
S3	Competitor B plan page and terms document	Monthly fee, prepayment discount, ambiguity on parts	A
S4	Competitor B public customer reviews	Speed of attendance, relationship-led service	B
S5	Competitor C care-programme page	Warranty link, approved parts, no published price	A
S7	Public restaurant-operator review corpus	Response failure as the dominant complaint	B
S8	Trade press on kitchen-service consolidation	Plan-based servicing becoming standard	C
S9	Search and messaging signals for "kitchen maintenance contract"	Plan language in active commercial use	C
S10	Competitor scale and outcome claims	Recorded as claims only; not verified	D

Appendix B — Confidence scale

High: multiple independent sources agree and the claim is verifiable from primary documents. Moderate: sources broadly agree but coverage is partial or indirect. Low: one source, or sources that do not corroborate; directional only. Insufficient evidence: the question cannot be answered from available public sources and is reported as such.

Appendix C — Glossary

Cost-to-serve	The true annual cost of servicing one plan customer: visits, parts, travel and technician time.
Contribution per plan	Fee received less cost-to-serve. The figure that decides whether a service business is a business.
Entry tier	The lowest published plan, usually priced to acquire rather than to cover. Comparing entry prices misleads; comparable tiers sit higher.
Evidence gap	A material question public sources cannot answer. Reported as a finding, never filled with an estimate.

Prepared by Arceon · Commercial intelligence for businesses making their next move. This is a sample. It is not advice, and no engagement took place.