

Linen Services

WHAT IS RIGHT FOR HIGH RISE

HOTELS!

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International hotels – the image of comfort, quality and decadence! Greetings from the top hatted concierge on arrival, warm smiles at check-in by reception staff and reaching my room without lifting a case. These hotels need not be the 5 (or even 6) stars that are peppering the market place, they are also the lower 3 and 4 city establishments as well as the many holiday resorts at a variety of locations.

A hotel is a slick business that needs to make a profit in the most efficient manner possible – often as part of a large group such as Accor, Sheraton, Intercontinental or standalone run for on behalf of a single owner.

The one thing that they have in common is the guest room that needs to meet a high standard – cleanliness, which involves the dusting, bedroom cleaning, amenities, basically applying specific attention to all areas that a guest comes in contact with and then all the other areas! All items to be used by the guest are placed in a uniform location throughout ensuring no effort is required by the guest in enjoying the comfort and service. Everything needs to be in working order.

Then, of course, there are the beds. Linen needs to be considered in the process. This becomes the real point of difference. The guest whether a over night business people (or longer), travellers in transit or short/ long term holiday makers. Staying in a prestigious hotel is often a well earned treat paid for with savings for a special occasion. Every one expects clean, crisp, well presented linen.

The housekeeping and laundry processes are critical in any business that is responsible for the accommodation of the general

public, be it hotels/motels, health, aged accommodation, hostels or cruise ships etc, ensuring hygiene is well managed.

The decision is which way to go. There are several options. These are to outsource fully, outsource the sheets/pillow cases while washing the towelling or to undertake everything in house.

Matthew Clark, from Girbau is a supporter of splitting the service if space is available. Processing flat work (sheets and pillow cases) involves large areas to be set aside for the laundry which may not always be available, however reducing to towelling only, this can be confined to a much smaller area and the quality of the towels can be of a high pile content. The flat work processing in international and other high quality establishments of 3 star and above should have ironed linen and this to be cost effective is often considered best to outsource. A towel folder is ideal when folding hundreds or thousands of blankets.

Questions are often asked about the benefits and running of an on premise laundry (OPL). To undertake the process in-house will provide control however when outsourcing, there is a higher level of consistency due to the automation of the process.

Consistency can occur in a full OPL, but this is subject to the laundry employee skills.

Quality is an important factor as well. Ironed sheets and pillow cases are a quality factor. While the hotel can operate an ironer – they may be labour intensive and the hourly rates may become exorbitant. A 500 bedroom hotel would have more benefit with a large double roll chest ironer. The selection of ironer ability is to ensure the evaporation rates are the measure of effectiveness.

Two factors that come into place are cost and hygiene. However the location of the hotel may be too remote for price efficiencies to come into play. The hotel size and high occupancy can make an in house laundry viable based on capital outlay.

Decisions of the laundry set up are also based on location and needs:

- Country vs Coastal (additional towels but longer stay with less bed linen change overs)
- Business vs Holiday (the latter maybe multiple people vs single rooms)
- Long vs Short Stay (regular full daily change overs increasing linen levels)

Sean West of Laundry Solutions Australia states that the “tyranny of distance and the lack of competing laundries has an impact on the decision”.

Linen quality is also important. Good quality linen that is purchased should be part of an overall process. Adequate supplies of linen should be on hand – not to operate a system of strip all the beds quickly and get the beds remade with the same sheets. And it does happen!! Poor quality linen will deteriorate quickly and will need frequent replacing – linen with a high thread count will last longer and have a better feel. It is recommended that a par stock level of at least 2 be available and this will ensure its longevity and will allow housekeeping staff to make beds with their linen supply and not having to wait.

Sean West is often asked whether an on-premise laundry is worth considering. He continues to say that an organisation must do the analytical work on whether it is viable and usually says that costs per kg are more expensive for the towels, bath mats and hand towels. Good quality bed linen has higher cotton content and these need finishing on a roller-ironer. A roller-ironer is expensive and takes space. Therefore Sean recommends after careful consideration, in-house towel laundering and outsourcing bed linen is a positive step.

If a towel is purchased at \$10 it may be a false economy in relation to not purchasing a better quality towel at \$12 – a higher up-front purchase cost may mean that a repurchase of the cheaper version may be 3 years later resulting in \$3.35 per year cost analysis compared to a 5 year life span for a better quality one at \$2.40 per year. Replacement should be gradual to ensure that budget is carefully managed and the standard is maintained. If a sheet is washed everyday – it will not last the distance of 3 or 5 years!

Selection of machines should be based on the process and hotel requirements. Size is important to ensure laundry assistants are fully occupied. Down time can be costly.

Washers come in two styles hard mounted washers, which are less expensive and the soft mount machines with internal suspension. The hard mount machines need to be secured to a solid floor and the extraction speed will not reach the levels of a soft mount washer. The soft mount machines do not require the same floor considerations and generally will have cheaper construction costs for the laundry. Good extraction has improved outcomes for dryer use. There is less moisture retention in the linen and will dry quickly. A cheaper hard mount machine may result in more energy use.

The selection is based on the workload. The items being laundered: the bed linen and quilts (although the latter may not be regularly washed), towelling, table linen, kitchen and cleaning products. It is important to be able to vary sizes of equipment – a larger hotel may have several large machines

with a few smaller. The large machines are to ensure, bulk work is processed quickly.

The varying styles of equipment will also meet the needs of the guests as well as the Hotel.

- Domestic – which allows the guest to wash their own items especially if at a coastal location – may not be an option in some hotels.
- Coin operated – with revenue going toward the cost of the equipment and utilities – may not be an option in some hotels.
- Semi Commercial – has the advantages of durability but may not always guarantee disinfection. Chemical feed, can be managed, but not well controlled.

Note: Are often top loaders and become high water users

- Commercial (small or large). These are durable and will cater for all loads. They are programmable for automatic chemical feed and will be more accurate with water levels and cycles than the semi commercial machines.

The washing machines are the first stage of the process followed by the washed items being placed into dryers. Depending on the level of extraction in the washers, it will result in the most appropriate dryers being selected. Usually 50% greater capacity dryer drum capacity will be used than the washer size. The smaller the drum size in relation to the washer, the larger the drying time and the more crushed items may be. Dryers will operate on electricity and gas (including LPG) with the latter the best option.

The large capacity is important as not to crush the items being dried especially if the sheets are being washed in house and are not going to be ironed!!

Space is an issue as a laundry does take space and often is an afterthought. It must be designed to prevent poorly selected equipment not suited for the workload, tubs for holding soiled and clean linen (as working off the floor is a safety issue) and storage. An adequate supply of linen needs to be available to ensure prompt room turnaround and longevity of the linen.

Several companies are in the market for supplying equipment and the underlying message received as a consultant is to ensure reliability and service backup is available.

Steve Borg of Aqualogic, a laundry supplier, echoes this and stresses the value of the supplier being involved in the commissioning and provides all the testing of the programs and equipment. This will include all the relevant training for staff and other operators.

Washing processes are important and for the best results on the wash and use of machines is to keep them filled to capacity. Under loading can cause damage to the drums as well as increase the cost of utilities per kg.

There is no right or wrong way of a laundry process. Cost and quality are the key issues. A popular process including high rise international hotels is to outsource the bed linen and keep towelling in-house. Towelling is manageable with only one person involved where bed linen presents well when it is ironed. If outsourced linen fails the quality test, it can be returned and a credit received where this won't be the case in an OPL processed piece of linen.

Advantages of outsourcing are that the items processed are quality inspected and any rewash is an operational cost of the contractor. Rewash in an OPL can be a costly process.

If an OPL is operating, some rewash is acceptable, usually 2-3%, and this becomes part of the process and operational supply cost. If machines are under-loaded, the chemical usage per kg will increase and lead to early degradation of linen.

Chemical companies will supply product that will be automatically dispensed to the commercial machines. Some laundry companies will organise the programming in conjunction with the chemical supplier however this does create flexibility issues and time delays especially to regional centres. There may be costs generated by the laundry company, which hinders the chemical company. Good chemical suppliers will also include in the supply regular service checks of equipment for efficiency.

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Sarah Hengl, Girbau Australia, "believes machines with a high range of program cycle possibilities available with some pre-programmed cycles are useful". The pre-programming is based on factory settings and may not be ideal for everyone but is a start. Sarah continued to say that "machines with multiple dosing signals are flexible and that machines should be fully programmable on-site, however download systems can be utilised to program multiple machines if required". It is an advantage for chemical companies to be able to program themselves.

The use of coin-operated machines assists where required a hotel to remain efficient while providing a service to its guests. These are usually in addition to a hotel's own in house laundry. They come as a range of washers with matching dryers (8 kg to 24 kg) – including Lavamac, Speed Queen, Maytag and Econowash. The top loader machine will come either as top loader or front loader machines.

Sustainability is often discussed when comparing one machine to the next. There are machines that have good ratings however with good internal practices, modern machines from all suppliers with their own efficiencies and good programming, leaves very little between each of the suppliers other than the investment cost.

Ozone is a method that allows all washing to be performed in cold water and reduced steps in the process resulting in utility savings of 20-30%. There is usually a lease or purchase cost involved. Many of the chemical companies have cold or warm water wash programs that also allow for the same non-thermal disinfection.

Craig Oldroyd from Richard Jay states "Hotel owners who take control of their laundry on-site, places quality control in their hands plus are in charge of the end result. This will ensure supply is available, against non-reliant, plant breakdowns, truck issues etc that a contractor might experience. It allows a specific linen type be purchased as it won't become mixed with other hotels".

The best option is to obtain independent advice to ensure that calculations of throughput will match the required expectations and budget of the facility. Once the machine capacities and configuration are known, then the hotel can go to the market and get the best-valued machine that will do the job. Each hotel has different needs, therefore careful analysis is required. The article does not discuss cost of operations in detail as each hotel has different arrangements and potential outcomes would differ. All final installation requirements need to be confirmed by the supplier.

All laundry operations are based on the Australian Standards 4146:2000, which recommends correct processes and disinfection. ■

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