

Hotel Laundries

By PAUL CREEK



Hotels come in many sizes from small boutique to large international organisations. Many seasoned travellers consider them a home away from home while others like to think that a hotel is something different from home where they can feel special and be literally spoilt.

The impact for the guest is usually the tangible front of house services – the concierge on arrival, the reception greeting at check-in or the various wait and bar staff during the fine dining experiences. A hotel is made up of many departments at the front of house however none can operate if all the back of house departments were non-functioning. The quality of service is measured by the seamless levels of interaction between the front and back of house staff.

The "back of house" departments operate as the engine of the organisation performing many "taken for granted" services resulting in happy and content guests. The question is often asked what is the core business of a hotel? Is it the hotel service received? The answer is of course YES, however the core business could also be considered the engine of the hotel, the maintenance, the laundry, the cleaning, the kitchen because without these a hotel is just a block of rooms that has nothing to measure its performance against.

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Could you imagine dirty linen, "grubby" towels, stained table linen, uncleaned bedrooms or lipstick on glasses?? How would the hotel appear then? It is with these points in mind that a hotel must consider the importance of the "back of house" services. Laundries are no different from the other departments and its quality will meet the high expectations of the guests such as the crisp ironed sheets, the fluffy bath robes and towelling and many other aspects of staying in the room. Quite often the core business is confused with the cost of running a department and therefore becomes a specialist area.

The laundry needs a specialist who is an expert in this field of dry cleaning, general production and a front line service attitude. Employee costs become an issue and result in outsourcing the services. It is often the lack of experience and established systems coupled with the high utility costs which are the real causes of poor performance.

A specialist manager would know how to operate a laundry, establish effective systems, keeping machines at capacity with little downtime and rostering the staff to ensure peak performance.

An on-site laundry will create flexibility and additional service opportunities. A well managed laundry can be more cost effective than outsourcing. Outsourcing services must still be MANAGED. Staff costs and performance can be managed. Critical to this is ensuring the correct machine selection occurs – washers, dryers, ironers and folders.

There are two ways to resolve the issue of laundry costs. Firstly, review the practices in place and ensure the machines are loaded to capacity which use the correct levels of water, gas, electricity, chemicals and staff time. In conjunction with this improve the systems and introduce environmental initiatives such as Ozone reduction in water and electricity consumption up to 40%. The second solution, which is less popular is to increase the hotel room rate and other service charges.

The laundry service to function well needs good linen supply, area to work, suitably appointed equipment, ozone and highly trained staff.

Linen can be supplied one of three ways to a hotel:

1. A hotel can have its own on site laundry staff operating its own laundry
2. It can have its own on site laundry with contract staff running the laundry
3. Outsourcing all dry cleaning and linen needs.

The least flexible is the last scenario.

Linen

Enough linen, all white and of a high standard, is recommended which will allow the laundry to manage at its own pace and schedule rather than on a demand and supply basis. There is nothing worse than having phone calls from the housekeepers requesting short supplies to be delivered. An imprest or ordering system in advance would provide the suitable levels the sheet and towel replacement. The advantage is owned linen remains the hotel's property and is not mixed up with linen going to many other hotels. This outsourced linen is subject to different levels of quality as it can be laundered along with the linen of many other hotels. Linen replacement programs may extend the life of the linen out to 3 to 5 years depending on the total laundering production completed.

Small corrective and quality issues can be addressed quickly and cheaply e.g. linen staining. White linen is selected due to clean appearance and failure to fade. Triple sheet supply is well established as

even hygiene in hotels is now a serious factor. The room presentation and freshness should give the impression of the room being used for the first time.

Work area

The required laundry work area is important and must allow a workflow exist that prevents cross-contamination of linen. All linen contained in linen bags will be received in the laundry via a chute or linen tubs. This area for sorting will be separate from the clean handling finishing area. All linen will be sorted into categories such as sheeting, towelling and table linen. The washing machines are loaded to capacity with one classification and set into operation. This process is continued until all washing is completed – if a full load is unable to be laundered, this will wait until there is additional linen available.

Once all wash loads are completed they are removed to the clean area for drying, ironing, folding and eventual return to the guest service areas. A variety of processes will occur in the finishing area. Bedding will be conditioned (part dried) in preparation for ironing. All the towelling will be fully dried and mechanically folded.

All completed linen will be packed onto storage trolleys for delivery to the guest areas. This will eliminate double handling that might occur if fixed shelving is used.

Equipment

The selection of equipment is important. Outlined below are some of the key pieces usually selected and the most are designed to reduce manual labour as the laundry can be a physical environment.

Washing machines – selection is made to meet expected throughput. A variety of washing machine capacity is available starting as small as 7 kgs through to 200 kgs and beyond. Commercial laundries which provide services to many organisations use tunnel washers. Calculations on machine selection are based on the expected linen levels being laundered and number of guest activities occurring. The rate is between 7 – 10 kgs per person.

Dryers – a dryer is selected to match the capacity of each washing machine which

will eliminate a back log of linen waiting to be dried. Sheetting and pillow cases are usually only part dried for later processing in the ironer.

Commercial 2-3 roll ironers – these machines have the capacity to iron 750 sheets an hour and depending on the complexity of the machine, they can feed, fold and stack allowing the operation to be undertaken by one person.

Towel folder – this is for the folding of all dried towels and will also stack.

Dry cleaning equipment - An important addition to some laundries in the large hotels is the dry cleaning units and this is a very lucrative process for a hotel to have where they can provide a service to the guests and be able to charge for the service. A same day service or inside 1 or 2 hours is a fantastic service for the guests.

Staffing

Staffing is another key factor and the competency of the staff is important. It is a physical role and staff selection must ensure this consideration is made. Staggered staff hours are important to get the best results and performance level. It is not necessary for all staff to be at work at 6.00am or at the same time in the morning.

Staff may actually be employed in the cleaning section at one part of the day and finish off in the laundry in the second part of the day which enables flexibility on site. Cleaning and laundry departments often work closely together and have common staff throughout. It is suggested a nucleus of laundry staff are always in place to ensure the high quality is maintained.

Ozone

The last area is the utilities of the laundry. These are gas, chemicals, water and electricity. A laundry will use approximately 20 litres water/kg linen washed. An important inclusion for all commercial laundries is an Ozone system. Ozone is the generation of gas O_3 that can be utilized in the laundry process that allows a cold water wash and electricity/gas savings of between 30 and 40%.

There are two Ozone systems in the market place. There is Corona discharge and Ultra Violet. Corona discharge is generated by the passing of high voltages of electricity over air and then saturated into the water supply or directly to the machine. Ultra Violet is created when air is passed over an UV lamp causing the oxygen molecules to split into single atoms and attached to other oxygen molecules to form ozone. In both cases, it is the constant stabilising and non-stabilising effect that results in the effectiveness in the wash process.



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Ozone is a cold water wash and pay back can be up to 18 months depending on overall activity.

The advantages of an On-Premise Laundry:

- Cost control and management of quality and stock levels are in-house
- Linen deliveries will be more timely without additional delivery cost
- Problems will be addressed quickly
- Laundry staff will be part of the overall team and will "live" the overall service experience
- Staff are more likely to provide input into quality improvement initiatives
- Imprest systems can be well managed to ensure shortages are eliminated
- A well planned laundry with the correct equipment and staffing attitude will be cost effective.
- Able to undertake special tasks – curtains, mop heads, shower curtains, bedspreads without extra cost.

The disadvantages are:

- Undertaking stock control will result in additional staff costs.
- Staff are often inexperienced and management do not have time to provide appropriate training
- Lack of laundry supervision/management experience to ensure correct linen service procedures occur
- High cost of setting up full laundry department and subsequent operational costs
- Labour costs if laundry is not managed well could be high plus on-costs of 30%-40%

In summary

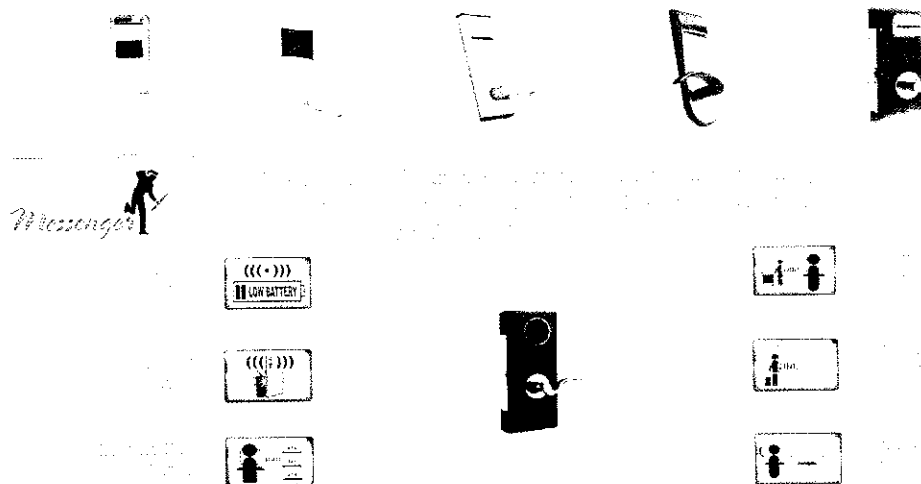
Creek Solutions Pty Ltd believes a well planned and staffed laundry is a positive step forward. Each hotel should give individual consideration for operating a laundry service and it is encouraged that contact with a consultancy service is received for advice. A commitment

to building a laundry is positive and the process must be inclusive as "cherry-picking" processes may become costly. ■

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