



Motel Laundries

Which way do we go!

PAUL CREEK | CREEK SOLUTIONS

Running a motel – OMG the work that needs to be included! Having run a busy motel in the Central West (NSW) back in the 1980’s, I discovered a managers “lot” was not always a happy one. A day filled with endless small tasks that needed completion – and the budget was not always there to cover it. I can get a plumber to fix a washer – the call out fee is one room night, I could get someone to mow the lawns, two room nights! And so on! And so on!

Running a motel is often a family business where profits can be achieved through good management and all hands “on deck” to keep costs low. There are jobs that can be managed in house with little effort; there are those that can be done cursing what a plumber would achieve in 5 minutes to my 45 minutes (but I would grin and bear it); and those jobs, which are best outsourced.

Linen is one of those areas that needs to be considered. The purpose of a motel is to provide clean accommodation for a variety of different guests ranging from one night business people, travellers passing through or short/long term holiday makers. Every one expects clean 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.

An example of an on-site laundry (towels only) as supplied by Craig Oldroyd of Richard Jay Laundries

Motel	Occupancy	Equipment	Outsourced Costs per month	3 loads per day (In house)
30 beds	80%	\$20,000	\$1,579	\$20,000 savings over 3 years

Note: These will vary dependent on the machine sizes, staff loading and other work habits. This needs to be fully worked through for each site.

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 motel can operate a small ironer – they may be labour intensive and the hourly rates may become exorbitant. Small low rated motels may not launder sheets but press pillow cases on a small press.

Two factors that come into place are cost and hygiene. However the location of the motel may be too remote for price efficiencies to come into play. The motel size and low 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 or 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 by motel owners whether to have an on-premise laundry. He continues to say that an organisation must do the analytical work on whether it is viable and usually notes 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 motel 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 motel may have three machines to a smaller site with two. This is to ensure that filling to capacity is maximised. A small machine 12-13 kg may not be suitable for a busy motel of 80 rooms as it would require many continuous wash loads.

In a town where there are several motels, a consortium (joint venture) may be worth pursuing to obtain a good price of linen for all involved.

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

- » Domestic – which allows the guest to wash their own items especially if at a coastal location
- » Coin operated – with revenue going toward the cost of the equipment and utilities.
- » 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.

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 a motel to remain efficient while providing a service to its guests. These are usually in addition to a motel'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.

In the motel industry, it is more likely a smaller machine will be used – suits one wash loads e.g. Families coming back from the beach (needing to wash the towels and swimming costumes), workers or other travellers who are away from home for long periods.

The option of “do it yourself” laundry is a WIN-WIN situation for the motel owners who will cover utility costs and provide some payback

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on the machinery. The guest does not have to send the clothing out at a more expensive rate than \$4-\$6 (approx.) per load in the washers and the dryers.

The motel may also find the coin-operated machine useful for small internal jobs. They would not use coins but special tokens. Some brands can utilise cashless smart cards.

With the many different operators with varying skill levels, coin-operated machinery is made for easy use. The operators need to use minimal buttons and knobs to operate.

David Bampton of Andrew Barton Laundry Equipment believes “that coin operated machines not only provides a revenue stream for a motel but covers the costly operation of wasted utilities. It also provides an alternative machine for the motel to use if they have smaller loads with tokens. When there is no cost recovery, washing machine users would wash one or two items in a full load. This way, the motel guest will realise this is not efficient and will ensure a fuller load occurs!!!!” Bampton continues “that sales have been up recently as the need for small guest machines with flexibility are required”.

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 “Motel 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 motels”.

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 motel can go to the market and get the best-valued machine that will do the job. Each motel has different needs, therefore careful analysis is required. The article does not discuss cost of operations in detail as each motel 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.

Paul Creek consults to the aged, health and hospitality industries throughout Australia and the South Pacific.

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