

OPL 101

Denver area hotel owner upgrades equipment in one fell swoop

Describes how replacing equipment reduced labor, utility costs, improved employee/guest satisfaction

BY BILL BROOKS

DENVER — For many hotel owners, their on-premises laundry room is an afterthought. The attitude of “If it’s not broken, don’t fix it” is common when referring to their laundry equipment, but old machines with outdated technology could be hindering your operation’s efficiency potential and hurting your bottom line.

It’s easy to underestimate the importance of a well-run laundry room with the proper equipment, but it could make all the difference when it comes to labor and utility costs, employee morale and guest satisfaction.

One person who understands the importance of an efficient laundry operation is Bruce Rahmani, a hotel owner with 34 years of hospitality industry experience. His journey to hotel ownership began in 1981, when he worked as a busboy at a hotel restaurant while he worked toward earning his master of business administration and doctorate degrees. He worked his way up the ladder, becoming a hotel manager and eventually an owner. He now owns 43 mid-tier, Wyndham- and Choice-brand hotels in this area, with another three hotels under construction.

Laundry is an essential component of any hotel’s operation. Linens need to be cleaned, and the more efficiently you can do this, the better. For the last two years, Rahmani has focused his attention on laundry efficiency through equipment replacement, and now is reaping the rewards.

REALIZING A NEED FOR CHANGE

Until last year, Rahmani’s hotels featured myriad mismatched laundry equipment of different sizes, models, brands and ages. This created several issues that were negatively affecting the bottom line of his hotels’ laundry operations.

Training housekeeping staff on laundry protocol was difficult and not standardized, as each machine came with different features and required its own set of instructions, according to Rahmani. Employees often became frustrated with the equipment, and, consequently, Rahmani noticed a relatively high turnover rate with his housekeeping staff.

Additionally, the longevity of the hotel linens varied depending on the machines they were washed and dried in. As clean, attractive, soft linens are an important factor in guest satisfaction, Rahmani found himself having to purchase new linens more frequently to ensure they met guest requirements.

“As a multi-hotel owner, I’m always looking for opportunities to improve business processes and increase my return on investment,” he says. “I did my research and knew that standardizing my hotels’ laundry operations with state-of-the-art equipment and advanced technologies would improve efficiency across the board.”

His machines may have been operational, but Rahmani knew they weren’t functioning at the level that he needed to achieve the maximum efficiency he desired. Facing a tough labor market and rising utility and linen costs, Rahmani turned to a local laundry equipment distributor, Clean Designs in Lakewood, Colo., to learn how the right machines could help him save time, money and resources.

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Rahmani was serious about finding the right laundry equipment that he could buy and install across all of his hotels to ensure consistency.

“At the time, most of my old machines were still working, which made me hesitant to throw them away,” he says. “But my goal was to improve productivity and efficien-



Hotel owner Bruce Rahmani says moisture-sensing technology in his new dryers keeps him from worrying about scorching sheets. (Photos: Alliance Laundry Systems)



Rahmani changed washers throughout his hotels, purchasing 48 new machines.

cy, and I knew upgrading my equipment would help me achieve that.”

It was important for Rahmani to choose laundry equipment that would be able to

effectively clean linens and have the proper technologies to evolve with industry trends.

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For example, when Rahmani started in the hotel business, beds were typically made with two sheets and a bedspread. The hospitality industry has since changed, and it's becoming standard practice to abandon the bedspread and instead make hotel beds with three sheets. In fact, many hotels require this of their franchisees and managers. This reality creates more laundry for housekeeping staff to clean in the same amount of time as before, which can cause issues such as limited capacity and increased labor costs.

On top of these requirements, Rahmani wanted equipment that would allow him to save money by using less water and energy. His goal was to increase throughput without having to buy more machines.

STANDARDIZING LAUNDRY OPERATIONS ACROSS HOTELS

After considering his options with his distributor, Rahmani chose a brand that specializes in on-premises laundry equipment and also provided the technology he required to increase his efficiency and preserve his linens.

"I made the decision based on the quality of the product and what I knew it would do for my business," Rahmani explains. "If you aren't keeping up with the latest technology and equipment advancements, you're missing the boat."

With the help of the manufacturer's in-house financing, Rahmani purchased 48 washers and 60 dryers in March 2015. He kept his new machines in a warehouse and began installing them at each of his hotels, one at a time. During this process, Ecolab worked as a partner to install the new machines at no charge. In a period of just six months, Rahmani was able to upgrade all of his hotels with new laundry equipment and has just as quickly begun to notice improvements in employee morale and guest satisfaction, as well as efficiency and cost savings.

Normally, it would have been a risk to finance such a large batch of equipment all at once, but Rahmani found working with his equipment manufacturer's finance program to be the best option to allow him to see results more quickly. The company is familiar with on-premises laundering and was able to tailor a financing package that fit Rahmani's needs.

"Credit approval was easy and quick, and the cost of interest is minimal compared to the volume of savings I have seen in labor costs and other expenses," Rahmani says.

IMPROVING RETURN ON INVESTMENT

With more efficient equipment, shorter wash and dry cycles, and less water and energy usage, Rahmani is saving a considerable amount of money on utility bills, he says.

He has also witnessed enhanced employ-



Hotel guests have commented that their sheets look like they've been ironed because of the new equipment, according to Rahmani.

ee morale with the addition of new equipment. His laundry operations are much more organized than they were before, and laundry doesn't get backed up like it used to.

Rahmani noted that his previous equipment often tangled towels and sheets, causing his housekeeping staff to spend a considerable amount of time untangling them. His staff is significantly happier now that the more advanced equipment works to eliminate some of the more cumbersome activities that had been dealt with. Rahmani's new machines feature various technologies that help automate the washing and drying process, removing the guesswork from the laundry operation.

"The technology on these modernized machines has allowed the laundry process to become automated and efficient, which makes my employees happy," he says. "Because our new dryers turn off automatically when the load is dry, our housekeeping staff no longer needs to continuously open the door to check if the linens are still wet and don't have to worry about overdrying our linens anymore."

With features like moisture-sensing technology that automatically stops the machine when linens are dry, Rahmani doesn't have to worry about scorching his sheets by letting them sit in a hot dryer for longer than is necessary. Linens last longer while continuing to look and feel fresh and

soft. He doesn't have to buy new linens as often as he used to. Guests have even commented that linens look ironed, when they actually come out of the dryer that way, he says.

The new washer-extractors are capable of producing industry-leading G-force speeds, reducing the amount of moisture in the load before it even reaches the dryer and further shortening cycle times overall. Increased G-force extraction also further reduces utility costs. The improved efficiency allows Rahmani's housekeeping staff to be able to work fewer hours and still complete their necessary duties, reducing labor costs.

"Before this equipment upgrade, I would have employees working in the laundry room from 6 a.m. to midnight," says Rahmani. "Now they're gone by 7 or 8 p.m., which is great for both parties."

Overall, in comparing last year's peak season numbers with this year's, Rahmani sees an impactful difference.

"I am very happy with my decision to replace my laundry machines," he says. "I think it's one of the greatest investments I have ever made as a hotel owner." ALN



Brooks

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Surgical

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gradually removed during each process and can be significantly compromised in as few as 10 washings.

What is the cost of having to retire a \$75 gown early versus using a barrier retreatment product? If the gown is expected to get 75 uses during its life, the product cost per use is \$1 per use. The cost of using a barrier retreatment program is about 5 cents per use. This would raise the per-use product cost to \$1.05.

If, however, the gown becomes unusable after, say, 50 uses, the actual product cost is \$1.50 per use. If you are using an aggressive wash formula and only get 25 uses before it becomes stained, then the

cost is \$3 per use. Based on my math, the break-even point on using the product is set at four additional uses of the gown.

It is clear that the cost of using a barrier retreatment product on new-generation reusable barrier linen can quickly be covered by the extended life of the garments. It also provides a quality assurance program that will be appreciated by your end-users. ALN

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