

OPL 101

Q&A: Evolution of on-premises laundry technology

RIPON, Wis. — Compare an on-premises laundry from 20 years ago to today, and you'll see that technology has the ability to make a laundry manager's job easier rather than more complicated. With advancements continuously making their way from manufacturing plants to laundry rooms, you might ask yourself what's in store for the next few decades. Here are three perspectives on the industry's technological evolution, as well as predictions about what the future may hold.

Q *What role did technology play when you first started in the industry, and what role does it play now?*

Bill Brooks, North American sales manager, UniMac®: Machines weren't nearly as precise or as customizable 20 years ago as they are now. For example, water levels—low, medium, high—and temperature settings—cold, warm, hot—were basic, and machines didn't offer features such as high G-force or moisture sensing. Innovation to engineering and manufacturing processes started ramping up in the early 2000s, resulting in more sophisticated equipment and control systems.

There are so many more models and lines available now, and we can build them quicker. Meanwhile, as a result of better quality control and manufacturing, the more advanced machine is built to last longer with fewer maintenance issues.

Jason Downey, regional sales manager, Southeastern Laundry Equipment: When I started at Southeastern five years ago, we used carbon copies on clipboards for every single transaction. Today, everything is electronic via a tablet, eliminating the need for paperwork while saving time and money, and meeting customer needs more quickly.

On the equipment side, thanks

to machines with advanced control systems, our customers can view vital performance information about their laundry operations from their smartphones or tablets.

Bob Baudhuin, vice president Engineering, Alliance Laundry Systems: You might have defined machines as "cookie cutter" a few decades ago. The more efficient and reliable, higher-quality machines available to OPL facilities today are a direct result of advancements in product development and design that didn't exist even 10 years ago.

For example, today, our engineers can design a machine and perform test simulations entirely on a computer. This reduces the number of physical prototypes we must build, while ensuring the prototypes we do build are almost exactly what we intended them to be.

Q *How can technology benefit a laundry operator?*

Brooks: A key challenge on-premises laundry operators have historically faced is the inability to measure efficiency, and therefore the inability to know if the laundry room is costing the business more than is necessary. Technology within a machine's control system can solve this problem by collecting machine performance data, and displaying it for managers in easy-to-read, executive-level dashboards. This tool enables managers to set benchmarks and make adjustments to the operation that can conserve water and energy.

Reducing water consumption also remains a key concern in the laundry industry. With machines that include features like spray rinse technology and eco-friendly cycles, laundries can reduce their water usage without sacrificing wash quality. Combine these technologies with the ability to set benchmarks and improve upon them, and decision-makers can

be sure the laundry room is operating as efficiently as possible at the lowest cost of ownership.

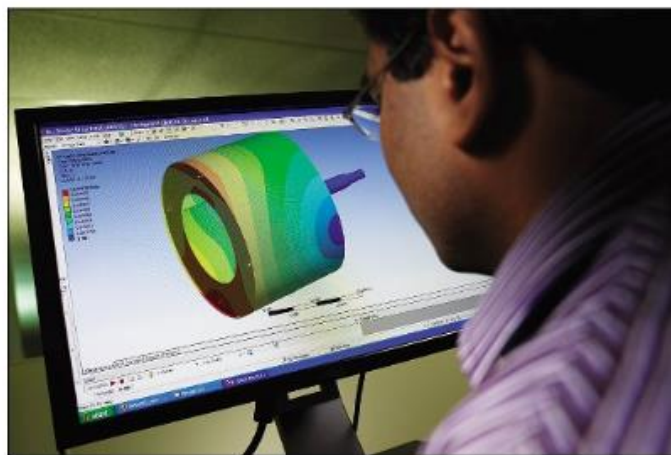
Downey: With new monitoring and reporting technologies, our customers can more easily track the laundry room's energy consumption and labor costs, and thus refine the operation's efficiency. What was once a cumbersome task, or virtually impossible, is now easier.

Consider a hotel, where, every day, energy and resources are expended via the showers, lights, air conditioning, heat, etc. In order to save money and cut costs, hotel decision-makers want to be able to track every aspect of resource consumption. Today, a washer-extractor can be connected to the Internet, where its performance can be tracked on a cellphone.

Baudhuin: Laundry operators are demanding equipment that is faster, more efficient and less expensive to run, while performing continuously day in and day out. They're also demanding equipment that is more user-friendly and intuitive. As an engineer, it's my job to make sure all of these concerns are met, and I wouldn't be able to without technology.

Ironically, as technology becomes more advanced, we're seeing that machines and control systems actually become easier to use, program and diagnose. I hope laundry managers who are hesitant to bring technology into their operations realize that the benefits far outweigh the learning curve.

Q *What does the future hold when it comes to advance-*



New monitoring and reporting technologies allow laundry facilities to refine and improve operational efficiency. (Photo: Alliance Laundry Systems)

ments in technology?

Brooks: We're just getting started. From engineering to manufacturing to the final product, technology is going to take the OPL industry to the next level, and at a rapidly increasing rate.

Quality will continue to improve, and products will be much quicker to market. It used to take decades for a product to debut with the latest technology. Now, it can take as little as a year. This greatly benefits on-premises laundry facilities, because they can enjoy technologies that increase efficiency and enhance their operations sooner.

I also think cloud-based reporting and remote networking capabilities will continue to automate the process of identifying issues, because equipment will be able to do it for you with more precision.

Downey: Equipment with cloud reporting capabilities is the future of how people will acquire information about their laundry operations. I also predict control systems will become more advanced, yet simple to program, and may even start looking like your phone or tablet. As a result,

we salespeople will be able to provide our customers with the tools to do their jobs more effectively.

As machine diagnostics get even better, we're able to counsel our customers without even stepping into the facility. People may shy away from the phrase "advanced technology," believing it sounds intimidating. I encourage my customers to instead use the words "simple" and "smart." Technology, when used to make life easier rather than more complicated, is a great thing.

Baudhuin: We already have a good idea of what the landscape will look like in five years. Features and functions that further reduce costs, enhance usability and improve productivity and efficiency for OPLs will be the norm. It's the next 10 years that remain unknown, but I do believe capabilities that we haven't even dreamed of yet will be available. **ALN**

UniMac®, a brand of Alliance Laundry Systems, is a provider of on-premises laundry equipment. To learn more, visit www.UniMac.com/OPL101 or call 800-587-5458.