

OPL 101

Technology helps keep watchful eye on laundry room

BY MARK MOORE

By now, you've probably seen the Super Bowl commercial featuring a 1994 clip from *The Today Show*. Hosts Katie Couric and Bryant Gumbel are perplexed by the concept of the Internet and are even unable to pronounce the "@" symbol. There's a comparable analogy—networking—that's emerged in the laundry indus-

try. While this concept is still unfamiliar to many on-premises laundry (OPL) managers, I predict it will be common practice in the future.

Just as there were early adopters of the Internet, smartphones, and countless other technologies, more and more laundry operators are seeing the benefits of networking their facility's laundry room, analyzing machine usage,

and giving their distributor access to this information as well.

With the ability to view data that shows machine performance, laundry room efficiency, and even employee productivity from any Internet-connected device, networking is evolving how managers do their jobs. As a distributor, being remotely linked to customers' systems is also improving the quality of support our company

can provide to them. We have visibility to quantitative data that allows us to make recommendations to improve efficiency.

NETWORKING IN ACTION

As I write this, I'm sitting at the computer in my Kentucky office, observing the status of the laundry room at a beach resort and spa in Destin, Fla. Of the hotel's seven washer-extractors,

one has a load of clothes ready to be unloaded, one is empty, and the others are mid-cycle. I can see there's one tumble dryer running at 180 F, and the load has 5% moisture left in the linen. When the load is finished in five minutes, I'll be able to tell how long it took staff to unload and reload the machine. I am able to view the laundry room with such detail because the facility's state-of-the-art control system is wirelessly networked to our system.

The hotel's chief engineer can also view this information in real time. As the laundry room is just one of many areas he oversees throughout the resort, the data helps him determine at a glance if it's running as efficiently as possible.

Networking allows him to pull up an overview of the entire laundry room from anywhere on-site and look for colors that represent each machine's status and time remaining. This customer views the reports from computer monitors housed in the hotel's control room; they also show everything from water temperature in water heaters to the status of the building's elevators. He also checks in remotely using his iPad while dealing with matters throughout the resort.

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In many facilities, machine status information is also typically displayed on a large monitor in the laundry room, allowing staff to quickly reference the screen rather than manually checking each machine.

With guest satisfaction top-of-mind, it is important to not only ensure equipment throughout the entire facility is working properly and efficiently, but also to analyze performance data and make improvements where necessary.

Before the laundry room was networked in 2011, the resort's team could only make educated guesses on how to improve productivity and throughput. Now, it is using detailed performance-snapshot reports to view information including machine usage, and to ensure the poundage-per-hour goal is met. It also can confirm workers are selecting the proper cycles when processing the resort's bedding, linens, tow-



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els and other items that are used at a facility that offers a variety of services. Making sure correct procedures are followed ensures articles come out clean and soft, and therefore that guest expectations for quality are met.

VIRTUALLY CONNECTED

While some of our networked customers are heavily involved with analyzing machine performance reports, others solely rely on us as consultants to look at the data and help them make improvements as necessary. Some do a little of both.

A main benefit of being networked to our customer's laundry operations is that we are able to notify it of issues before personnel there have even realized they've occurred. Alternatively, if a customer alerts us of a problem, we can log into its system and begin to troubleshoot immediately, reducing downtime. Depending on the issue, we are frequently able to address it without even visiting the customer's site. One example occurred just a few months ago, 350 miles away from our office.

A facility in the long-term healthcare industry was suddenly not seeing the wash results it had come to expect from its equipment and wash programs. By logging into the customer's system through the network, we were able to verify the chemical company had unintentionally adjusted wash formulas while performing routine maintenance.

Without having to make the round trip to visit the site, we were able to rectify the issue and reprogram the machines from our offices. This also prevented the customer from losing money due to downtime and lost productivity. To ensure this doesn't happen in the future, we now receive e-mail and text message alerts whenever programming is altered—intentionally or unintentionally.

Another networking story is related to staff productivity and procedures. A customer's chemical company informed us that the linen reject rate in the facility had increased to about 50%, meaning every other item had to be rewashed because the stains were not being removed.

To get to the bottom of the issue, we took a look at the customer's reports. When studying the facility's third shift, we saw that staff was selecting incorrect cycles. Workers were throwing everything, no matter the soil level, into machines and running the fastest cycles possible so they could go home earlier.

Items that didn't get clean would go in the reject bin, causing the customer to lose money due to the extra chemical, utility and labor costs associated with rewash.

Without the technology that allowed us to pinpoint the issue, our customer may still be dealing with the high level of rejects,

and unaware it should actually be looking more closely at the staff's use of appropriate cycles.

Furthermore, networked machines can send text messages or e-mails to workers and managers when a cycle is finished, when maintenance should be performed, or should any error codes arise to further improve the OPL's productivity and avoid downtime.

With a productive and efficient operation as the goal, tracking your laundry equipment goes hand in hand with tracking your employees.

Another situation in which networking saved time, money and

potentially even more involves another long-term healthcare customer.

We set this facility up with networking and, with our ability to view machine performance reports, found that tumble dryers were giving off a specific error code. Staff was not cleaning lint filters properly, resulting in excessive lint buildup. In fact, it was so excessive that the buildup very well could have caused a dryer fire. Because we were able to view the facility's report, we were able to apprise the customer of the issue and potentially prevented a tragedy in the 1-year-old, \$10 million facility.

LOOKING AHEAD

As these examples show, networking and being wirelessly linked to our laundry customers has a direct effect on the speed and type of service we can provide. As technology evolves, our ability to maintain systems, prevent issues and troubleshoot customers' laundry equipment only gets better. In turn, our customers are better able to run a safe, productive and efficient laundry operation.

While the majority of our customers do not currently utilize this service, more than 90%

have the capabilities, and it's only a matter of time until more begin to adopt this technology into their operations.

Just as with the Internet, I predict that 20 years from now, we'll look back on doing business without networking and wonder what we ever did without it. ALN



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Mark Moore is the vice president of REM Company Inc., a distributor of UniMac® laundry equipment. For more information on UniMac, visit www.unimac.com/OPL101 or call 800-587-5458.

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