

The Answer is to AUTOMATE!

Technology—coupled with new approaches to doing business—can help secure future growth

And YES, we actually did sell uniform business at \$2.50 per change. Man, have times changed.

The question is, have we as an industry changed? We've become more competitive in our pricing structure. We've stressed the importance of training. We've become more productive on the routes by purchasing larger, more efficient vehicles. We've stressed the importance of customer service and promised 24 hour or less response time for service issues.

The answer is yes, we ARE a changing industry. So what can we do now to keep up with the technological advances and those around us who are moving forward?

Mechanize to realize success

Why automate? Because the price on the street for a set of uniforms keeps going *down*, while insurance and energy costs continue to skyrocket. Tell me one thing in your plant that costs less today than

By Charles Berge

Twenty-eight years ago, back in 1980, I began my career in the laundry industry as a route representative for F. W. Means at the DeKalb, IL, depot. After my "extended" two-week training period, I was handed my company product pricing book and the new sales commission policy was explained to me. Since I was eager to put an additional \$100 per month in my pocket, I turned to the pricing page and started memorizing!

ITEM:	WEEKLY	Every Other Week
Bar Swipes	.22 each	.30 each
Dish Towels	.22 each	.30 each
Lady Bib Apron	.40 each	.52 each
Short Bib Apron	.40 each	.52 each
Waist Apron	.40 each	.52 each
N1B Shop Towel	.08 each	
N2B Shop Towel	.12 each	
3x5 Mat	3.50 each	5.00 each
4x6 Mat	5.00 each	7.50 each
3x10 Mat	7.50 each	10.00 each
65/35 Garment Shirts	1.00 each	
65/35 Garment Pants	1.50 each	
100% Cotton Shirts	Need General Manager Approval	
100% Cotton Pants	Need General Manager Approval	



Automated equipment like the material handling system shown above lets you process more goods, faster, with high quality, while lowering utility costs.

it did 15, 10 or even five years ago. Increasing the pounds per operator hour can make you more competitive. Reducing your utility costs in today's market simply has to happen. In the current economy, we MUST learn to do business smarter than ever before. If you take the attitude of "We've always done it that way" then watch out. You won't be able to compete in the marketplace and will continue to lose market share.

Size up bottlenecks

Now, before you start looking at *what* you want to do, you'd better be thinking of *where* you want your business to go. This could be an expensive journey, if not done properly. You certainly wouldn't

plan your dream vacation without any idea of a destination. No plane tickets, car rental or hotel booked—of course not! You'd seek the help of a professional. Trust me, my dad planned plenty of family vacations on the fly. While they were memorable, at the time they were also a *nightmare!*

Dreams can change and then so do your plans. Make sure you take off your blinders and clear your mind of all those preconceived ideas on the way you've always done things. Then and only then can you get started!

First we must remember Newton's third law: "*For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.*" Take a walk through your plant and look at everything. I mean really take a good hard look and ask questions about everything you see. Why do you do this task this way? Is there a better way? Is there a benefit to doing this task, or would a different way be more beneficial? Talk with your production employees. Ask them what would make their jobs easier. You might be surprised at the ideas they share with you.

While walking through the plant, did you find a bottleneck? This, as you know, is anywhere the goods are pushing their way through the plant. Most likely you'll find more than one bottleneck in your plant. The only good bottleneck is clean merchandise in the stockroom waiting to be delivered.

So now you've taken a walk through the plant. You've asked your employees how to do things better. You also may have identified a

you'd like to go. Now is the time to seek the travel agent who will help you to get from point A to point B. This will probably be the most important part of the project. Which agent do I trust to get me where I want to go and then back home without breaking the bank?

To get started, you need to develop a relationship with an independent consulting company that shares your passion for the laundry industry. Have that company work *for* you. Have them do a layout of the existing plant in an electronic version of AutoCAD. This is your roadmap of where you are now. This can also be modified to become the roadmap to get you to where you want to be! The destination is productivity and more profits. The advantage of using an independent consultant for the facility layout and design is that they do not have an allegiance to any equipment manufacturer. They also have a better understanding of the relationship one piece of equipment may have to another and the overall impact on your utility infrastructure.

Streamline production methods

The automation process needs to begin as soon as the delivery representative or route sales person (RSP) returns to the plant. Remember that automation eliminates "touches," so something as simple as having the delivery rep or RSP unload the soiled garments, mats and mops into soil slings qualifies as automation.



Automating a wash aisle helps reduce the number of carts moving through the plant by hand. With fewer 'touches' by employees, throughput improves.



Advances in soil-sorting technology, including high-tech conveyors like the one shown above, increase efficiency by ensuring accurate weights so the proper amounts of water and chemicals are applied to clean the textiles.

couple of bottlenecks. What now? Look for additional input.

Access outside expertise

I hope that most of you are members of a cost group. If not, check into one. It's an excellent way to share ideas and possibly learn from someone else's successes and/or mistakes.

Start attending the TRSA meetings and see what other plants are doing. There's no law that says you can't copy an idea that you saw while on a plant tour. In fact, while on the tour you'll be able to ask questions of the vendors and operators about what you see that interests you!

Now, hopefully you have a list of ideas and a direction of where

Bags of soiled linens, shop towels, aprons, and kitchen towels should be hung and stored above the soil department, waiting for the operator to count and sort the goods. Again the delivery rep or RSP can place the bag into the system while unloading his or her vehicle.

The soiled linen bags then would be counted and sorted onto a conveyor where another operator can easily sort them into slings by category. A vacuum or soil sort would eliminate another touch and would be a highly automated system. There can even be the possibility of using RFID chips to count and capture history on any particular item.

The next step and a very important one in automation is the

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Plant Development

easy to work with.”

Adaptive technologies

The new machines added during the Bates Troy plant expansion also incorporate Braun's new WASHNET[®] Data Management Software. This system provides operators with real-time information and the ability to monitor data by machine in order to solve problems and evaluate performance.

By seamlessly linking all networked equipment, the data-management system creates a central operating station and is expected to contribute to the company's bottom line by helping to plan and control an efficient laundry operation. With the software, operators can monitor equipment, manage formulas, back up configurations and view the production and alarm history of the equipment.

“The expansion will help us become the more competitive and more efficient in our laundering process,” said Kradjian. “We also

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plan to expand our service area from a 90- to a 120-mile radius. As a small organization, we are fortunate to be able to continuously adapt and implement changes that meet customer demands in a competitive service industry.”

Racing green

As a result of the expansion, Bates Troy was honored with a Broome County, NY, Green Business Initiative Award in recognition of the company's reduction in energy and natural resources, implementation of new technology, measures to sanitize the soil room and installation of new monitoring and metering equipment for all energy, natural resources and waste.

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“Our laundry equipment partner, G.A. Braun, has incorporated green design into the engineering and production of their new tunnel washer by reducing water and natural gas consumed,” Kradjian said. “We are very excited to start enjoying these efficiencies and savings which will ultimately help us be more competitive in the marketplace.”

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Plant Efficiency

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elimination of hand loading washers and dryers. Once the sling has reached the proper weight, it should be lifted onto an overhead storage rail system, separated by category. Ceiling height is critical to accomplish this. If ceiling height is an issue, consider using a simple hoist mounted above the washers for loading. If you have merchandise with RFID chips or bar codes, this can be another opportunity to track goods through your facility.

To transfer clean merchandise out of the washer and into the dryer, try using a shuttle. This is a great way to stay hands free, if space is available. I do realize that some facilities have a space issue and cannot accommodate equipment such as this. In those cases, you have to get either a circle rail system installed with a lift, or use a simple hoist mounted above the dryer to lift the sling for loading.

Now we have counted, washed, and dried our goods. These cleaned goods can include garments, mats, mops, shop towels, kitchen towels, CRT's, linens, etc., and they usually aren't stocked in the same location. At this point, it can be a logistical nightmare to deliver them to the correct departments.

Carts have been considered the automobile of the laundry industry for years. The cart is loaded to capacity and then manually driven to the appropriate location. Reminds me again of my dad and how we loaded everything into the car for vacations, squeezed in the family and off we went. Times have changed and the family road trip has changed. Now it's time for you to change your way of thinking.

Fly into a new era

Imagine that New York City is where the delivery rep or RSP unloads the soiled merchandise into the plant. San Diego is where they load their clean goods for delivery. You counted the soil and sent it to the sling system in one area (Philadelphia). You washed the goods in another area (Baltimore). Lastly they were removed from the dryer (Pittsburgh). Now how do we get all these goods to San Diego via Cleveland (garments), Chicago (linens), New Orleans (mats) and Las Vegas (towels)? You have two choices: 1) you can drive them (use your cart) or you can put them on a flight (use a clean goods rail system)! Which do you think is the most cost- and time-efficient? In today's energy market, the importance of increasing your pounds per operator hour and how this relates to your energy costs is your primary concern.

Along this journey I have touched on areas that will improve productivity, but only you and your independent consultant know what will work best for your facility and your budget. At the very least, I hope I have planted some ideas in your mind as to ways to increase productivity and think outside the box. This is an industry that at times has been slow to adjust to new ways of doing business. **YOU** can change that “We have always done it this way” mentality. Dare to go beyond! TR



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