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Fabricating a formidable future together

Last month in Las Vegas, it was a time for cleaners to reflect and emotionally connect during the California Cleaners Association's Fabricare 2023 conference.

While many of the educational seminars presented at Harrah's Casino focussed on how to forge ahead for a stronger future, the highlight of the weekend was a revealing look at the average drycleaning plant owner and consumer in a program presented by Jeff Schapiro, CEO of Cleaners Supply.

The company commissioned two recent studies and the collected data offered a detailed look at the state of the drycleaning industry.

While the full report can be accessed on page 6 of this publication, here are a few highlights:

- 94% of drycleaning consumers are "very satisfied" with their current cleaner;
- 41% of drycleaning business ownership is expecting to change hands within 5 years;
- 51% of U.S. cleaners say business is still off from 2019 — and that's after many have raised prices multiple times.

It's been a difficult few years for the industry, but those who remain seem more poised and prepared to become the hero of their own stories, much like the ultimate storyteller himself — Walt Disney.

During a program by Disney scholar Jeff Barnes, he detailed many bad decisions and early bankruptcies that befell the famous animator along his way to success.

Regardless, he never gave up on his dreams, and neither should cleaners.

"Inaction is a slow death. I want to challenge you to stop thinking and start taking action. You can always overlive. You can never overreact," Barnes said. "What you think is impossible is really an opinion, not a fact."

Sharing a similar sentiment, Ryan Fish of Red Hanger Cleaners divulged many of his own hard choices, both personal and professional, that he had to make during the pandemic.

His moving presentation brought the entire crowd to its feet at its conclusion.

Fish's approach has been to try to instill a family culture of encouraging his children to try to do hard things because, if you can deliberately do hard things, it's like having a super power.

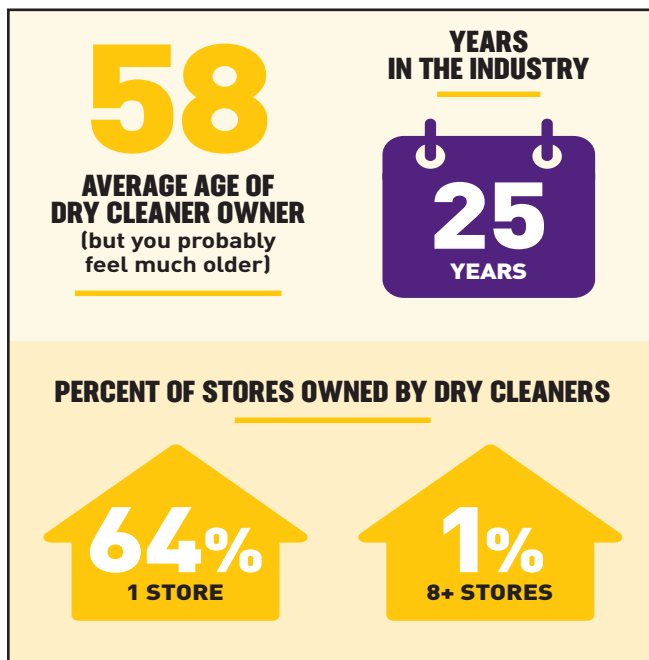
"Being in debt is hard; being financially disciplined is hard. Choose your hard," he said. "Life will never be easy. It will always be hard, but you can choose your hard because everything you want in life — whether it's fame, time, success, a great relationship with

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A FULL HOUSE attended the California Cleaners Association's Fabricare 2023 Show in Las Vegas early last month, and they came ready to engage and emotionally connect throughout the weekend. Some of the excellent speakers included (left photo) Ryan Fish from Red Hanger Cleaners and (right photo) Jeff Schapiro from Cleaners Supply.

Diving into new drycleaning data



According to information provided by Cleaners Supply, who commissioned two recent studies on drycleaning consumers and plant owners, the average drycleaner at this point in time is 58 years old, has 25 years of cleaning experience and, mostly likely, owns one store.

Don't blink, however, as the landscape will be changing soon. A total of 41% of the industry have plans to sell or transfer ownership of their business within five years.

For the full Special Report, go to page 6.



Sneak Peek Inside

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Supplying cleaners with new data and insight

This month, in lieu of featuring our popular industry profile article on page 6, we are making space for a Special Report that, in effect, profiles the state of the drycleaning industry at this time. Jeff Schapiro will discuss some of the insightful findings from when Cleaners Supply recently sponsored surveys of 1,000 high-use drycleaning customers (those who use the service weekly or multiple times per month) and 924 drycleaning business owners across the U.S.

First off, in terms of customer service and satisfaction, the industry earned an A grade. Of all surveyed, 94% said they were “very satisfied with their current drycleaner.”

That is simply amazing. On top of that, 70% of these high-use consumers indicated that they would be **willingly to pay more for even higher quality**. Customers crave quality to the point that poor quality is considered the number one reason why those surveyed would leave their current drycleaners, followed by (in order of significance): poor customer service, slow service and, lastly, price.

The survey discovered that many customers (66%) would be willing to bring in more garments if turnaround time was faster and the vast majority (75%) would like to be notified when their garments are ready and, across all age groups, text is the preferred method of communicating that over a phone call or an e-mail.

So, in short, if you want to keep customers happy, focus on achieving quality, text them when their garments are ready and work on providing a quicker turnaround time.

For the survey that focussed on owners of drycleaning businesses, there were many notable takeaways. Slightly over half of all cleaners reported that sales were still down from 2019. Regionally speaking, the Northeast and South were hit the hardest during the pandemic.

To help offset the drop in sales volume, 83% of cleaners surveyed said they have raised prices since 2019, most in the 10 to 19% range. However, the price adjustments are far from over. Of those polled, 50% still plan to raise their prices again before the end of this year.

Perhaps the most interesting findings of the survey is that we can put a face

on the industry — a 58-year old one. That is the average age of the drycleaning business owner in the study. And, that “average” owner has 25 years of experience (which kind of explains the 94% customer satisfaction rate).

Even with all that experience in the industry, ownership requires a major investment in time. Over 77% in the study reported working more than 40 hours per week.

Perhaps the most compelling statistic in the study is that 41% of drycleaning business ownership is expected to change hands within the next five years. Mind you, this number appears to be mostly influenced by the high-ish average age of drycleaners and not a knock on the strength of the industry itself.

With 56% of the industry believing that business is getting better and sales are increasing, there is a sense of optimism for the future, even as 47% of cleaners reported being understaffed and having difficulty filling positions.

The three most common services that cleaners have added to generate revenue include: alterations, 15% of total sales; wash-dry-fold, 11% of total sales, and fire restoration, 10% of total sales.

Another good indicator for the future is the industry’s willingness to continue making capital investments — 57% of cleaners plan to do so within the next three years, most often seeking drycleaning and pressing equipment, followed by wetcleaning machines and software systems. So, that means a large number of owners who may leave the industry soon are still making sure they are keeping their business up-to-date with technology and equipment.

As Schapiro noted during his presentation at Fabricare 2023, current business conditions are very similar to the ones back in the days following the industry’s dreaded “polyester” era when drycleaning was considered a horrible industry in which to invest. “You know what happened to the drycleaners who were still in business back then? They did extremely well,” he explained. “That’s where we’re at right now. We’re going to see a very small fallout of cleaners closing — we can call it the Great Retirement — but that’s going to be a slow migration. I think if you’re investing in your business now, if you’re finding ways to push forward, I think you’re positioning yourself not to do good, but to do great.”

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How Many Dry Cleaners Has Your Insurance Agent Handled? One or Two? Three?

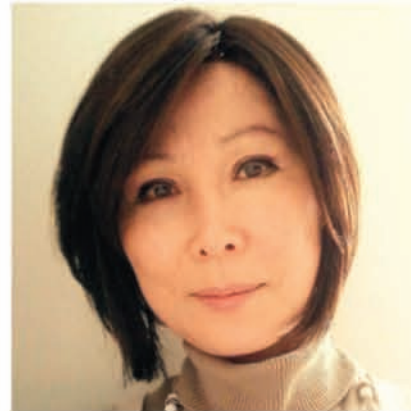


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SPECIAL REPORT

by JEFF SCHAPIRO

New drycleaning studies

The drycleaning industry, like many others, was left in a state of uncertainty at the beginning of the pandemic.

Nearly everyone I spoke to in the industry was asking the same two questions: *what would happen to drycleaning and what were other drycleaning owners seeing and doing in their business?*

It got me thinking: Why doesn't the drycleaning industry have any good market research data available?

In order to understand what consumers were thinking during the pandemic, and to help the industry in a small way, we commissioned a first research study on consumers and drycleaning in 2020.

However, when we finished, we realized there were still many unanswered questions. So, we recently completed two separate research studies on drycleaning consumers and owners.

To my knowledge, this is the most extensive study ever conducted for this industry, and our hope is the data will provide insight that might prove to be beneficial to your business.

Before diving in, I'd like to note that the 1,000 consumers interviewed for this study had to identify themselves as high-use customers.

To qualify, they had to meet the criteria of utilizing drycleaning services weekly to multiple times a month (customers who make up the bulk of the average drycleaner's

business), but also that price is the *least* motivating factor.

What will customers pay more for?

As mentioned, the number one reason customers would leave their current cleaners is quality. So, it makes sense that **70% of customers** (including 84% of millennials) indicated they would be willing to *pay more* for even higher drycleaning quality.

Prices have risen across nearly every industry, and this one is no different. In fact, 83% of cleaners have raised prices since 2019.

Now, let's look at the speed of service: **66% of customers willing to wait two days or more to get their cleaning back say that if the turnaround time was faster, they'd be willing to bring in additional garments.**

This means that even if customers are willing to wait, they might be holding back on the amount of items they bring in.

What else do your customers want?

Today's consumers don't just want to place an order and be surprised by the arrival of their package.

notified when their garments are ready, with *all ages and demographics* noting that they would **prefer to be contacted by text** over a call or email.

Now that we've gained some insight into what drycleaning customers are thinking, let's see what we can learn about current challenges and opportunities from owners. We conducted this study with the help of 924 drycleaner owners across the U.S.

Sales and Units. *Slightly over half* of drycleaners reported that **sales are still down from 2019**. Regionally, the Northeast and South have seen the biggest hit to sales. Those cleaners whose sales are down are more likely to be even worse off from a unit perspective.

Garment Trends and Prices. Prices have risen across nearly every industry, and this industry is no different. In fact, **83% of cleaners have raised their prices since 2019**, with the majority in the 10-19% range.

Additionally, **50% responded they plan to raise prices further by the end of the year.**

We wanted to benchmark the pricing on a national average for a few popular items, but it's *important to note* that these can vary quite significantly from region to region.

Laundered Shirt: \$3.69
Blouse: \$7.56
Pants: \$7.65
Sweater: \$7.88
2-Piece Suit: \$17.19
Queen Comforter: \$36.69

The two biggest challenges facing cleaners today are recruitment and increasing sales. A total of 47% of cleaners reported being understaffed, leaving many owners responsible for picking up the extra hours.

business).

How satisfied are customers with their drycleaner?

Let's start with some good news — **94% of high-use customers are very satisfied** with their current cleaner.

When asked what would cause them to look for a new one, participants responded (in order of significance): **poor quality, poor customer service, slow service and price.** This not only shows they really value quality above all else,

Look at how Amazon handles deliveries — people can track their shipment down to how many stops away the delivery is — and then receive instant notification when delivered with a picture as proof.

We understand that Amazon has logistical capabilities that most cleaners do not, but you can meet this consumer need with a *simple text message.*

That's right, **75% of consumers responded to the survey that they would like to be**

On the consumer side of the study, **82% responded** that they were aware of what they were paying for each garment. However, when asked for the prices, responses varied greatly.

Store operations and challenges. From a dollar standpoint, most cleaners typically see **2/3 of sales come from drycleaning** and **1/3 from laundered shirts.**

From a production standpoint, the average cleaner is back to cleaning and pressing

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HOW SATISFIED ARE CONSUMERS WITH THEIR DRY CLEANER?

94%

of dry cleaning consumers indicated that they are very satisfied with their current dry cleaner.

TOP 4 REASONS CONSUMERS WOULD LEAVE THEIR CURRENT DRY CLEANER.

1 POOR QUALITY

2

Poor Customer Service

3

Slow Service

4

Price

WITH THE COST OF EVERYTHING GOING UP, MOST DRY CLEANERS HAVE BEEN FORCED TO RAISE PRICES.

83%



WHO IS THE TYPICAL DRY CLEANER OWNER?

58

AVERAGE AGE OF DRY CLEANER OWNER (but you probably feel much older)

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

25 YEARS

PERCENT OF STORES OWNED BY DRY CLEANERS

64%

1 STORE

1%

8+ STORES



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Jeff Schapiro

New drycleaning studies prove illuminating

Continued from page 6
4.8 days per week, which had fallen during the pandemic.

The two biggest challenges facing cleaners today are **recruitment** and **increasing sales**. A total of **47% of cleaners reported being understaffed**, leaving many owners responsible for picking up the extra hours.

Adding fuel to the fire, **89% of owners indicated that, compared to last year, finding employees is about the same**

and revenue generation in percentage of total sales:

Alterations: 15%
Wash & Fold: 11%
Fire Restoration: 10%

When it comes to investing in marketing, **54% of owners do not believe in spending money** in this area. Those who do find the greatest return with Google Ad Words, email marketing, and text marketing.

The future of drycleaning
Overall, most owners indi-

An enduring issue for the drycleaning industry in the last few years has been the surge in remote workers.

Luckily this seems to be turning around, with more and more companies calling their workers back into the office.

According to a February 2023 study conducted by Pew Research, **35% of those who can work remotely still are**, down from 43% in January 2022 but still a far cry from the **7% of remote workers pre-pandemic**.

[Editor's Note: For the full report from Pew Research, visit them online at www.pewresearch.org and search for "About a third of U.S. workers who can work from home now do so all the time."]

So, there's still potential for a lot of growth in the industry moving forward.

In summary, I'm very optimistic about the future of the industry. **Consumer satisfaction sits at 94%**.

Additionally, we've all seen in the headlines that more and more companies are calling workers back into the office in some capacity, which will only be good for our business. If you would like to view either of the studies further, you can access them on the Cleaner's Supply website at cleanersupply.com/research-reports.

Jeff Schapiro has been the president of Cleaners Supply for more than 31 years. Originally, the business began in the basement of his drycleaners in upstate New York. Today, it is a manufacturer and distributor of more than 20,000 drycleaning products shipped to cleaners all over the world. He can be reached by email at jeff@cleanerssupply.com.

We are in for a change, though, with the average age of a cleaner at 58 years old, 41% of cleaners ownership is expected to change hands over the next five years.

or more difficult.

Who is the typical drycleaner owner?

Today's average cleaner is 58 years old with 25 years in the business — though that might feel like much longer for many.

When we look at operators in the U.S., **84% operate two stores or less**, with the vast majority (**64%**) of them being **single-store operators** and only a select few (literally the 1%) having **eight stores or more**.

Additionally, the typical owner works incredibly hard, with over **77% working over 40 hours per week**.

Growing your business

At the end of the day, that's what this study is about — understanding the drycleaning consumer wants and what others in the industry are doing to help improve and grow business.

Pick-up and delivery has always been a big part of many cleaners, but there was a definite uptick in that service during COVID and the corresponding lockdowns.

Now, **52% of cleaners offer pick-up and delivery** (71% at no extra charge), making up **24% of sales on average**.

For those who don't provide this service, it could be a great way to increase business. However, our study also uncovered many other ways you can increase sales.

Many cleaners added services to generate additional revenue.

Here are the top three additional services by popularity

cated they are pretty optimistic about the business moving forward.

Things are looking up with **56% saying that they see business getting better and sales increasing**.

We are in for a change though, with the average age of a cleaner at 58 years old, **41% of cleaners ownership is expected to change hands over the next five years**.

Despite the expected turnover, **57% of cleaners still see themselves making some type of capital investment in their business within the next three years**, with drycleaning and pressing equipment being at the top, followed by wet-cleaning machines and software systems.

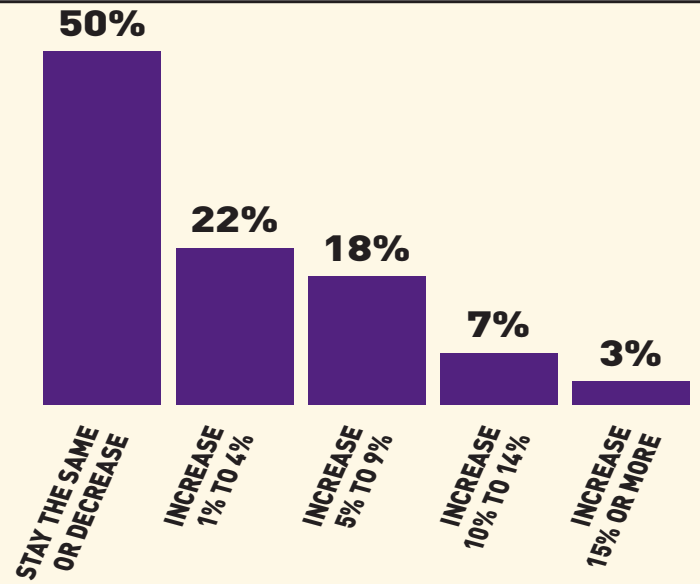
This is a good indication that, while they might be letting go of the reigns soon, they are confident that the business will only continue to get better and that the investments are worth it.

YOUR CUSTOMERS WANT TO BE NOTIFIED WHEN YOUR GARMENTS ARE READY.

75%

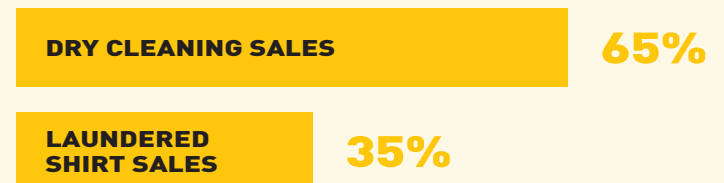
of consumers want to be notified when garments are ready.

DRY CLEANERS EXPECTING TO RAISE PRICES BEFORE THE END OF 2023.



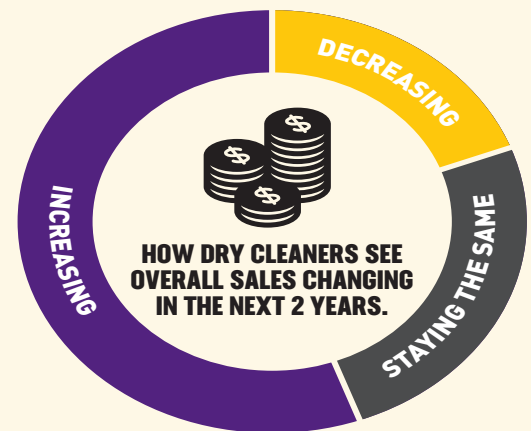
STORE OPERATIONS AND CHALLENGES.

PERCENT OF TOTAL AVERAGE SALES COMING FROM DRY CLEANING AND LAUNDERED SHIRTS.



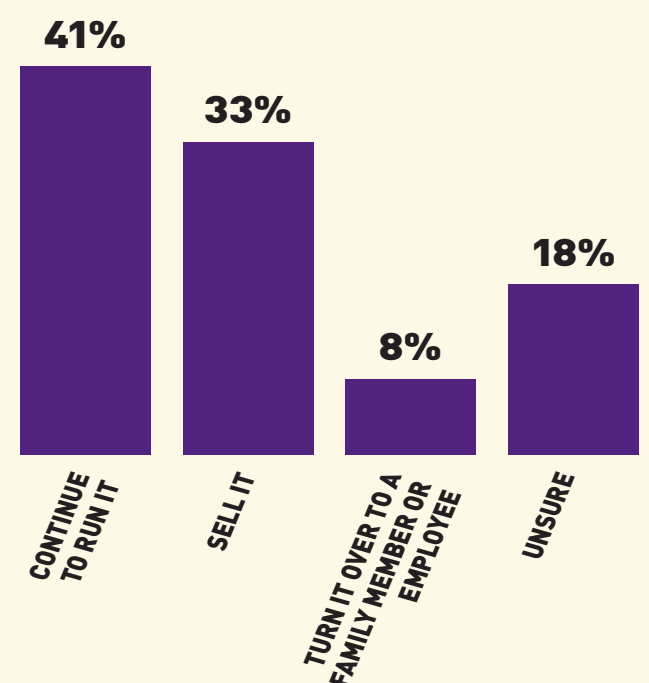
WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF DRY CLEANING LOOK LIKE?

MOST DRY CLEANERS FEEL PRETTY OPTIMISTIC.



56% 16% 28%

DRY CLEANING OWNERS' PLAN FOR THEIR BUSINESS IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS.



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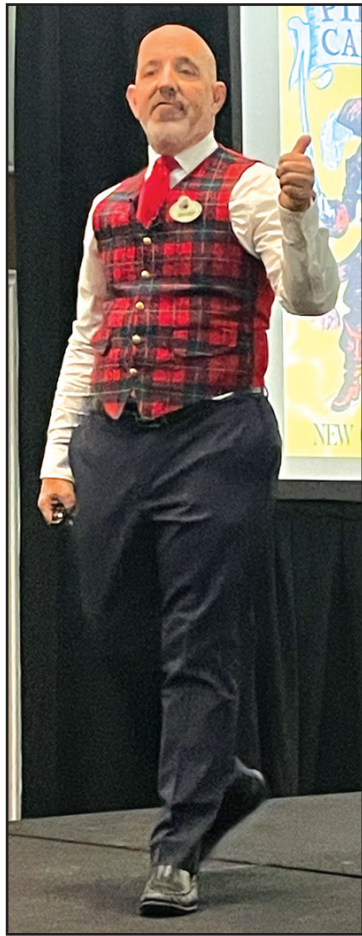
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Fabricating a formidable future together

Continued from page 1
 your kids and your family — everything you want in life is on the other side of that wall.”

“If you stay in your comfort zone, that’s where you’ll fail,” he added. “You’ve got to get comfortable getting un-



SPEAKER JEFF BARNES patterned himself after his hero, Walt Disney, to become the hero of his own story and now teaches a college class based on the life lessons of the beloved animator.

comfortable, but you’ve got to want to be successful. Put some pressure on yourself because pressure is a privilege.”

The People Industry

The Cleaners Supply surveys made one thing abundantly clear: quality is unquestionably the most important factor to consumers when it comes to drycleaning — not price, location or even customer service.

In fact, Schapiro had also noted that 70% of consumers (including 84% of Millennials) said they were even willing to spend more on drycleaning for additional quality.

Jason Loeb of Sudsie’s Cleaners — a high advocate of quality himself — sees the future in that same vein.

“If you’re a quality cleaner, then you drive the business based on quality,” he explained. “So, when you look in the mirror, you have to decide what you want to become. And, if you’re in business to make money and give the quality of life you want to provide for your team, what are you going to do to differentiate yourself from everybody else?”

For his part, Loeb wants people to stop incorrectly referring to this industry as “the cleaning business” — he’d like a rebrand.

“We are in the *people* busi-



A PANEL OF INDUSTRY EXPERTS took to the stage during a session moderated by Peter Blake of DLI. Pictured (from left to right) are: Ken Uchikoshi from Sankosha; Nathan Dubasik from MetalProgetti; Mack Magnus from M&B Hangers; Tom Zengeler from Zengeler Cleaners; and DLI President Kathy Benzinger.

ness!” he emphasized. “I’ve chosen to make a difference to the people who I surround myself with. I want to change people’s lives. I’ve changed them in my organization and my community and I’m trying to change our entire industry to start to get the recognition that everyone in this room deserves for getting up and working every day and providing a service to the community that you serve.”

Reputation Management

To maintain a strong brand these days, cleaners need to

focus on online reputation management, which remains more important than ever.

In fact, 85% of consumer say they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.

During his program on the topic, Yash Patel of BeCreative 360 noted that if you can’t manage your own online reputation, you should definitely hire somebody who can.

Fortunately for the do-it-yourselfers, new artificial intelligence-based apps and tools are available to make the process more efficient and a lot less time-consuming.

“AI-driven tools can analyze vast amounts of data and AI can continuously monitor and mention social media conversations,” Patel said. “AI can do a lot of things you may not know. If you’re not utilizing a platform that is doing this for you, you’re going to be sitting in your office trying to think about your marketing.”

Also, he noted that having a nice looking website is not enough anymore; there must be fresh content to keep your business relaxant and high up in Google searches.

“If your website is very static, there’s no information going in or out,” he added. “Google is not going to put you on the front page. If you’re using a software that helps generate reviews, there should be a link in that software that you can add to your website so that it is generating live reviews.”

Other Takeaways

While the domestic drycleaning industry has been undergoing its own major transition, panel discussion member Ken Uchikoshi from Sankosha shared interesting information about some of the

struggles happening in the industry overseas where cleaners are also facing a difficult labor market and anxiety to raise prices.

“Recently, the worldwide drycleaning industry is shrinking dramatically,” he noted. “Japan was in a much bigger market than America 10 years ago, but Japan is shrinking to almost one-fourth in size in these 10 years — same as in France. Actually, I went to France months ago. Most of all, Paris right now is closed down.”

When Uchikoshi recently hosted numerous Japanese drycleaners on a tour of several plants in Chicago, they learned that the American industry has much better profit margins overall.

“Of course, profit is important, but the Japanese cleaners don’t actually make that much profit. If you think about Profit & Loss and check the operating income — most of the Japanese operators don’t even make 5 percent. Some make just 2 or 3 percent,” he added.

Another trend he has witnessed — the rise of wash-dry-fold across the globe, has also led Sankosha to work on manufacturing a special all-in-one new folding machine.

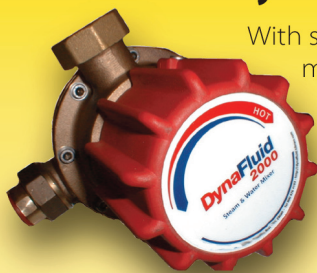
“You can fold not only the shirt, but the pants, even the flag, everything is by one machine. So, this is making a very unique solution for the future,” he said.

There was no word when the new machine will be ready, but perhaps it will make its debut next year.

During the show, CCA announced its plans to host a live equipment show in October of 2024 at the Horseshoe Las Vegas. Look for more details in the future.

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WRENCH WORKS



BY BRUCE GROSSMAN

Building a boiler and creating steam

Your boiler is a device with the simplest concept, yet is often the most troublesome in your plant.

In addition, it is also the most potentially dangerous. For this reason **never do any maintenance or repairs of any kind on a boiler that is hot or under pressure.**

There are many different types of boilers, usually differentiated by the method of transferring heat from the burning fuel to the water.

Examples of various types are water tube, fire tube, and tubeless, with many configurations within each type.

We will not get into the FABs and FAQs of each type since this article aims to understand what a boiler is and how it functions in generating steam.

Take a pot of water, put it on a stove, and heat it on a low flame. Put a thermometer in it; if you are at sea level, the thermometer will read 212°F.

Turn the flame up all the way, and the water boils more violently and changes to steam at an accelerated rate, but the thermometer still reads 212°F.

As long as there is water in the pot, that thermometer will stay at 212°F.

Steam rises from the surface of the water and disperses into the air without being able to do much in the line of useful work except if you have some vegetables in a steamer above the water in the pot.

If you put a lid on that pot that was tight enough to contain the generated steam, the pressure in the pot would begin to rise.

There is a direct and unchanging relationship between steam pressure and temperature. Forgive the expression: it's baked into the nature of the water.

Since this increase in pressure is also pressing down

on the boiling water, it takes more heat energy (see definition of BTUs from ar-

ticle in October 2023 issue) to force the water to convert to steam.

This increase in heat energy is reflected in an increase in the temperature of the water steam mixture.

The higher the pressure inside the pot, the higher the temperature of the steam and water mixture's boiling point.

There is a direct and unchanging relationship between steam pressure and temperature. Forgive the expression: it's baked into the nature of water.

That is why you heat your drycleaning presses with 80 lb. steam (324°F.) and your laundry machinery with 100 lb. steam (337°F.).

If you had some veggies in the pot, they would cook to mush in no time.

What you now have is the kitchen appliance called a **pressure cooker**, capable of producing internal temperatures much greater than 212°F.

In addition, the space above the water line and the lid is a built-in storage area for the contained steam.

At some point, unless you somehow release the steam or turn off the heat source, the pressure will increase until the pot ruptures (explodes).

Therefore, on all pressure cookers, there is a weighted or spring-loaded relief valve that controls the internal pressure and a safety or blow-out fuse or vent that will rupture if the relief valve fails.

The following paragraphs will incorporate the concept described in the pressure cooker analogy to constructing a steam boiler.

Now, let's start adding components to a closed

Continued on page 14

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Bruce Grossman

Building a boiler and creating steam

Continued from page 12
pressure vessel to create a gas-fired boiler.

Bold letters at the beginning of each of the following paragraphs will refer to the corresponding component location on the accompanying illustration.

the water. When all the water boils away and there's nothing to adsorb heat energy generated by the burning gas, the temperature of the metal of the pot will rise until it glows red.

In a boiler, this would de-

The safety pressure control activates when the maximum boiler operating pressure is exceeded, shutting off the gas solenoid. The safety pressure control requires a manual reset, warning the operator of a problem in the pressure control system.

A) Let's install an electric solenoid valve in the gas supply line so that we can turn the gas on and off.

This would be your gas supply system, at the end of which is a burner that distributes the gas flame evenly around the pressure vessel.

B) Since we are dealing with gas and its explosive nature, we need to know that when the solenoid valve opens, the gas ignites almost immediately.

If not, we shut the solenoid cutting off the gas flow to avoid a possible explosive condition.

This control system is the ignition monitoring system.

C) As I previously mentioned, as long as there was water in the pot, the temperature would not rise above the boiling point of

stroy the boiler. So, let's place a sensor in the boiler that monitors the water level.

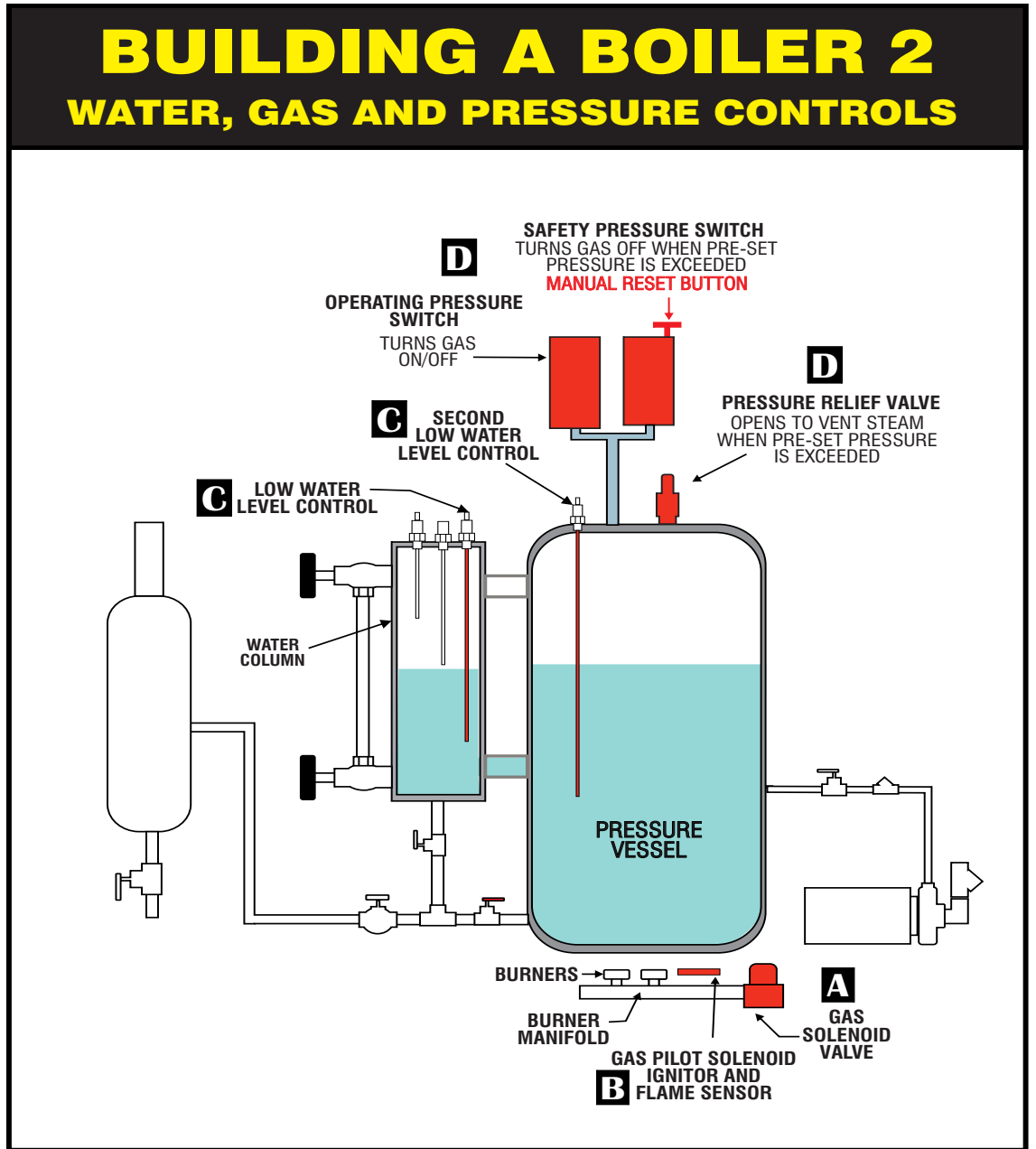
If the water level drops too low, we'll shut off the gas supply to the burner. This sensor is your boiler's low water level control.

Assuring the proper water level is so critical there is usually a requirement for a second low water level control for safety.

D) Another parameter that needs to be monitored and controlled is steam pressure.

Steam pressure regulation is accomplished by an operating pressure control that turns the gas solenoids on and off at a preset pressure when the desired pressure is reached.

Usually, an additional



safety pressure control is added as a backup measure. The safety pressure control activates when the maximum boiler operating pressure is exceeded, shutting off the gas solenoid.

The safety pressure control requires a manual reset, warning the operator of a problem in the pressure control system.

Steam explosions are devastatingly destructive. Therefore, an additional device is required to prevent an overpressure explosion.

This device is the pressure relief valve. Should all the other pressure control devices fail, this valve will open before the bursting pressure of the boiler is reached, allowing steam to

vented to the atmosphere, thereby lowering the steam pressure.

In the next several issues of this publication, I will explain other systems and components which, when combined, form the steam and return systems used in typical drycleaning and laundry operations.

Until then, see you next month.

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NEWSMAKERS

Recently, **Xplor Spot** announced an innovative feature for its business management software called **Virtual Assistant**. This new feature can handle basic inquiries, enhancing efficiency for both businesses and customers as well as delivering a seamless customer experience.

Laundry and drycleaning business owners are facing labor shortages, inflation, and rising costs. With these conditions making it harder to operate efficiently, business owners need quicker and easier issue resolution. Virtual Agent has already saved time for drycleaning customers. For example, the average duration of

a customer support call is 25 minutes. However, the average duration of an interaction with the Xplor Spot Virtual Agent is just 15 minutes.

Xplor Spot is pioneering a new era as the drycleaning industry leader by introducing this state-of-the-art conversational AI customer service feature and platform. This innovation is set to revolutionize drycleaning customer support. With round-the-clock accessibility, customers can conveniently seek assistance whenever they need it. Moreover, it equips users with self-help tools, granting them the autonomy to discover solutions independently. During

standard support hours, customers can still effortlessly engage with live agents for personalized assistance if needed, ensuring a comprehensive customer service experience.

Xplor Spot's Virtual Agent feature is delivered by boost.AI, an enterprise platform known for enabling outstanding customer experiences with conversational AI, without requiring extensive technical support. This technology efficiently manages millions of interactions annually for leading organizations across sectors, including Xplor Spot.

"We're embracing the future of AI-powered conversa-

tions with excitement, and we're thrilled to bring conversational AI to Xplor Spot customers," said Tom Beidle, CEO Personal Services at Xplor Technologies.

ZIPS Franchising LLC is pleased to announce that **Jennifer Hall**, formerly a store operations and development manager for the company from 2008 to 2019, has rejoined the organization as **Field Training Manager**.



In addition, **Jennifer Hall**

tion to institutional knowledge acquired over her previous 12 years at ZIPS, Hall brings extensive experience in project management and field recruitment and training to her new role. Aside from her many years at ZIPS, her career has included roles as a national account manager for Bayard Advertising, a recruitment marketing firm helping companies fill open positions, and as operations project manager with home-cleaning company The Cleaning Authority, where she worked with the corporate operations team and franchise owners on training, recruiting, onboarding, marketing, real estate selection, vendor account setup, supply and equipment purchasing, software needs and more.

"I'm thrilled to return to ZIPS and look forward to working with franchisees on building successful training cultures that aid in the success of their employees and, ultimately, their businesses," said Hall.

Clean Franchise Brands (CFB) recently announced the opening of a **Martinizing Cleaners** in Saltillo, MS. Martinizing Cleaners of Saltillo is owned and operated by **Gregg Kennedy** and his wife **Margaret Ann**. The Tupelo, MS, residents converted the former Town Creek Drycleaning and Laundry into a Martinizing in July. Martinizing Cleaners of Saltillo represents the third Martinizing Cleaners for Kennedy.

He also owns and operates Martinizing Cleaners locations in Tupelo, MS at: 603 West Main Street and 1196 West Main Street. Kennedy took over those two locations in 1990, buying the business from his in-laws, Margaret Ann's parents, Bert and Jo Ann Frazier.

"One of the reasons I bought the two Martinizing locations back in 1990 was Martinizing's unique way of cleaning and drycleaning clothes. I thought it was appropriate for a unique city like Tupelo — birthplace of Elvis and a vibrant music scene," said Kennedy. "Thirty years later, the Martinizing brand is stronger than ever. So it was a complete no-brainer to convert this location to a Martinizing Cleaners to bring the Martinizing brand to even more people in the greater Tupelo area." For more information, visit www.martinizing.com.



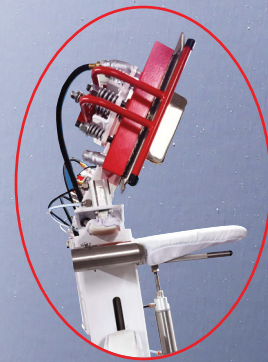
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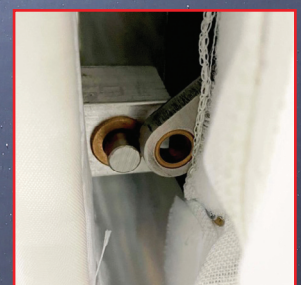
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TURNAROUND TIME



BY JOHN ROTHROCK

The Hour Lot system: A lot to focus on

In this latest chapter of our exploration of **The Focus Method**, we continue to delve deeper into its practical applications and significant impact on the drycleaning industry.

If you're new to this series, I recommend reading the introductory articles from previous months (available online in our archives at www.national-clothesline.com) to fully understand the comprehensive framework this method provides for business improvement.

Ask a group of drycleaning business owners for the single most important piece of advice for running a profitable and efficient business, and you'll receive a wide range of answers. In part, that's what makes our industry so unique and challenging compared to others.

What if I told you there's one correct answer to this question? An answer so powerful that those who possess this knowledge often keep it a closely guarded secret due to the substantial operational advantage it provides.

If you're wondering why I'm sharing this valuable information for free in a national publication, the answer is simple: our industry is at a crossroads. Over the past two decades, piece counts have sharply declined, resulting in the closure of many cleaners. Simultaneously, we're facing a "Brain Drain" with too few skilled professionals remaining in manufacturing, supply, ownership, and employment.

Without change, our industry's decline will continue. Now is the time for collective action, sharing our best ideas to help us all thrive and serve our communities.

While there are numerous ways to structure a successful drycleaning operation, **The Hour Lot** is unequivocally the best systematic approach for cleaning textiles to generate a profit. Large or small, central plant or package plant, same day service or 3-day service, **The Hour Lot** is the

most critical strategy for every operation.

So, what is the Hour Lot system and how does it work in your plant?

The Hour Lot system classifies textiles by cleaning method, dividing them into separate lots of a specific quantity, systematically moving through each step of the cleaning process in approximately an hour, broken down into four stages:

- Inspection/Detailing
- Cleaning/Spotting
- Finishing
- Inspection/Assembly

When developing your company's Hour Lot system, you must identify key variables. Begin by assessing the cleaning methods and services you offer to determine if each warrants a separate lot or if some can be combined. Common cleaning methods include drycleaning, wet cleaning, shirt laundry, jean laundry, WDF, households, and specialty gowns.

For example, at Yale Cleaners, we manage three lot systems: drycleaning, shirt laundry, and jean laundry. Wet cleaning and specialty gowns are grouped with drycleaning, while household items are part of the jean laundry lot. If WDF services were offered, it would require a separate lot classification.

Next, consider the size of each lot. To determine your lot size, analyze the constraints of each cleaning method in your facility, which may vary due to equipment and technology.

In most cases, drying capacity is the limiting constraint. For example, if your plant can clean 100 pounds of drycleaning per cycle (about an hour), that represents approximately 100 garments. Shirt laundry will be limited by your wash capacity or shirt finishing equipment. WDF will likely be limited to your folding capacity.

Once you correctly identify the constraints in your cleaning operations, that information must be converted into how many pieces per hour it represents.

For example, if your plant can clean 100 pounds of drycleaning per cycle, this equates to roughly 100 garments (See calculation below). Similar calculations should be applied to other lot classifications. Ideally, each lot classification should produce the same

that's all you're doing, I can do that myself!" News of this success spread quickly, and soon the lot system was implemented across our company.

Note: Our lot size was initially reduced from 100 to 60 pieces for a smoother implementation. As produc-

The Hour Lot system classifies textiles by cleaning method, dividing them into separate lots of a specific quantity, systematically moving through each step of the cleaning process in approximately an hour.

number of garments per hour, ensuring balanced production.

• **Formula:** When properly loaded, a 100-pound drycleaning machine can clean 80 pounds of clothing. If an average garment weighs 0.75 pounds, the machine can clean up to 106 garments per load ($80 \text{ lbs} \div 0.75 \text{ lb/piece} = 106.67$ pieces).

Implementing the lot system within your plant can be a challenge. In 1988, when Yale first tested our lot system, none of our store managers were receptive to being the test site. A creative solution was needed to prove its effectiveness. We chose one location and gave the store manager the morning off. Before the staff arrived, all the day's production — drycleaning, shirt laundry, and jean laundry — was grouped into lots of 60 items. By lunchtime, the staff had completed all the day's work, a task that typically extended until nearly 5 p.m.

When the manager arrived around 1 p.m., she was furious because there were no clothes to be cleaned and no one was working. However, once we explained everything and she saw how well the lot system worked, she immediately recognized its value.

By the third day of the experiment, she no longer wanted or needed upper management's help, even going so far as to say, "If

tion speed increased, so did our lot size. It was incrementally increased by 10 pieces per week until our 100 piece lot size was reached.

In simple terms, here's how the lot system operates within your plant. Begin at the inspection/detailing stage. Every time you input 100 drycleaning garments into the computer, roll the buggy back to your cleaning wheels and start the machines. This process applies to other lot categories as well.

Keep the first lot together as it emerges from the cleaning wheel and move it to the finishing area.

Once pressing is complete, transfer the entire lot to the inspection/assembly station. Avoid mixing lots and minimize stragglers. Your goal is for pressers to complete one lot of clothing every hour, thus eliminating the need to count individual pieces pressed per hour.

Instead, you manage the lots moving through the building, overseeing processes and systems rather than micromanaging your team's activities.

The benefits of this Hour Lot system are substantial: increased efficiency, huge labor savings, faster processing times, fewer production errors, and more time for quality cleaning and finishing.

As you implement the lot system, you may identify deficiencies in your opera-

tion. This is a normal part of the process, and over time, you can make strategic investments for optimization. In my experience, acquiring software capable of lot system management should be a top priority — offering significant results with minimal investment.

Several reputable software providers offer these capabilities in our industry. While I don't endorse any one vendor, some software providers with lot management capabilities include Cleaner Business Systems, Comca Systems, SMART, and SPOT.

In closing, the Hour Lot concept is more than just a theory at Yale Cleaners; it's a fundamental part of our daily operations. As Bill Rothrock, one of the key figures behind Yale Cleaners, has repeatedly emphasized, "I would rather shut down our best location than operate it without using the lot system!" This statement highlights the profound impact of The Hour Lot in our real-world drycleaning operations.

In the ever-evolving landscape of the drycleaning industry, the Hour Lot is the beacon guiding us toward efficient, profitable, and sustainable operations. By thoughtfully dividing textiles into specific lots and moving them through a systematic four-step process, drycleaners can achieve remarkable efficiency.

As our industry faces unprecedented challenges, embracing innovations like the Hour Lot is not just advantageous; it's essential.

John Rothrock is the president and CEO of Yale Cleaners, a family drycleaning business in Broken Arrow, OK, that is focused on providing high quality, same day drycleaning with exceptional customer service. He earned a degree in Business Administration in 2005 from the University of Oklahoma. He is a graduate of the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute, and is a Certified Garment Care Professional (CGCP).



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BUILDING VALUE



BY KERMIT ENGH

Ways to get your business to run without you

I was recently on a fishing trip with my brothers in the Florida Keys and somehow the topic came up about how a business can operate without the owner being in the business daily. If you remember, this is one of the **Eight Drivers of Business Value**, the **Hub and Spoke**.

The youngest brother works as a Senior V.P. for a \$4.5 billion a year construction firm, and he asked what I've done to enable me to get away on the trip we were on. I explained that this is not an overnight process to get your company to be less or not dependent on you as the owner. Systems, processes, and SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) must be developed, implemented, and managed.

This topic was front and center earlier in October when I was honored to speak at the CFA conference in Toronto. Those who know me know I enjoy presenting and speaking, and this topic is a passion of

mine: Working in a way that you have a life to enjoy.

If you aspire to build a valuable company, one crucial factor is to ensure your business can operate independently without your constant involvement. However, embarking on this journey can feel daunting.

In this article, we'll ex-

high-salaried employee.

If you can't afford to replace everything you do, niche down your core offering. For example, Casey Cavell's baseball business, **D-Bat Academy**, could have catered to a broad range of players: professionals, softball players, slow-pitch beer leaguers, and fast-pitch, but

one of its primary objectives is to give an eight-year-old an awesome birthday party, well, an entry-level employee can deliver on that.

When you narrow down your offering, you can bypass the high salary that comes with someone with a wide breadth of experience.

It is incredible to realize

employees by seniority, with the owner and CEO as the top listing. However, this communicates that you are the most important person in your company, triggering everyone from salespeople to suppliers and prospective partners to want to go straight to the top by calling you.

An effective strategy for downplaying your role in your company (and getting others to step up and shoulder more) is to list employees alphabetically rather than by seniority on your company's website. This approach can minimize the spotlight on you.

Additionally, using titles like "Head of Culture" and "Head of Product" instead of "CEO" or "owner" can further obscure your seniority, making it less likely that customers will call you by default. My goal for years has been for our customers not to know who I am.

If you have multiple locations and route services, you are down that path. You can't be everywhere every day. Getting your business to thrive without you gives you the freedom to cherry-pick the projects you want to work on or choose just to own your business and collect passive income.

A business that runs without you is also a valuable, sellable asset if you decide to move on to a new chapter in your life. Nicheing down, creating SOPs, and downplaying your role on your website are all tactical things you can do today to get your business running more independently in the future. If you want to learn more about growing value in your business or have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact me — Until next month.

Kermit Engh has been an owner/operator in the drycleaning industry for over 30 years and has been a Methods for Management member for over 27 years. His positions as managing partner of MfM and as a Certified Value Builders Coach allow him to share his extensive background in strategic planning, finance, process improvement, packaging and branding, employee training programs, profitability, cost analysis, acquisition analysis and succession planning. To find out more about how Kermit can help you maximize the value of your business, contact him at kengh@mfm.com.

Niching down, creating SOPs, and downplaying your role on your website are all tactical things you can do today to get your business running more independently in the future.

plere three cost-effective, simple strategies to set your business on a path to autonomy and allow it to thrive without your constant presence.

1) Replace yourself by niching down.

Most owners can't replace themselves because a substitute would be too expensive. Trying to replace your breadth of experience would likely require a very

instead, he got specific about who his business was for: five to 10-year-old kids.

Sure, he could have charged more per customer if he catered to college athletes and aspiring pros — but those elite athletes would expect to get a hitting coach with years of expertise, and Casey would have had to staff for that.

On the other hand, when you have a business where

that you most likely have current employees who can relieve you of the mundane tasks that are time sucks and provide little value to the business.

A few examples are:

- 1) You still run to the bank to make deposits.
- 2) Turning on the boiler in the morning.
- 3) Reconciling bank accounts (I still do this one).
- 4) Not allowing your managers to manage because of micromanaging.

2) Create a question diary.

When Jodie Cook was building her social media agency, she made a conscious choice that every time an employee came to ask her a question, she would write it down.

The easy thing to do would have been to answer the question, but she forced herself to write every question down. She used that question diary as a guide to create a business manual documenting how to do every task required of her employees.


Her manual came in the form of an Excel spreadsheet with 50 tabs, each one documenting a specific process, like payroll for example. Challenge yourself to do the same.

When an employee asks you a question, resist the urge to answer and move on. Document those queries and turn them into a standard operating procedure (SOP) that enables your staff to develop expertise.

The go-to reference becomes the manual instead of you. Then, require your employees to use it before asking any questions.

3) List your employees alphabetically on your site. Most companies list their


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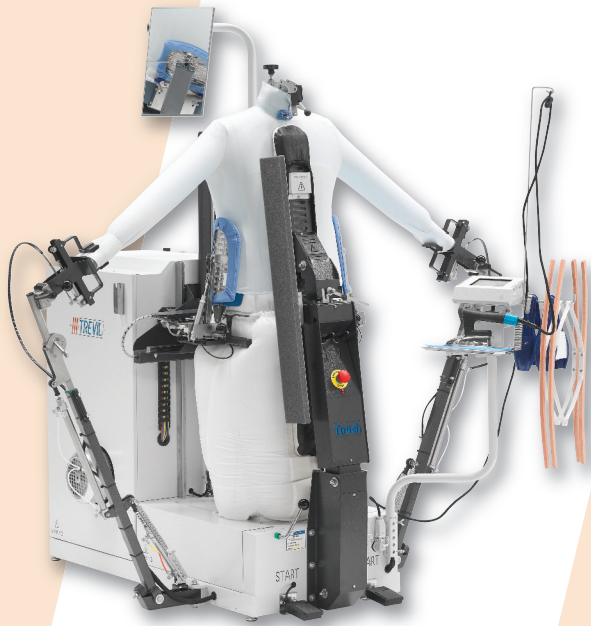


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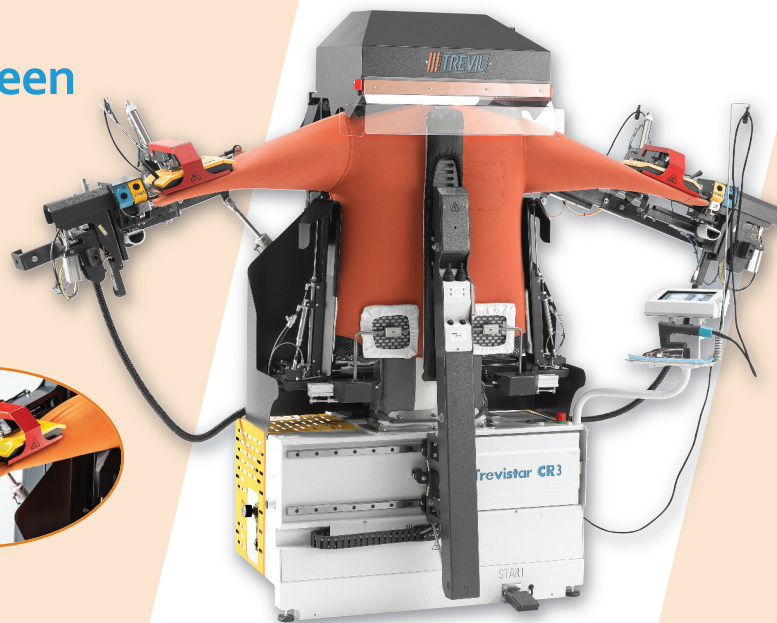
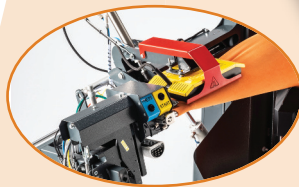
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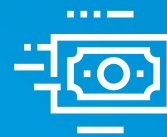
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The importance of counting your costs

by **RUSTY SMITH**
Guest Columnist

Which of you, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and count the cost? Many of you recognize this Biblical passage from the Book of Luke.

Even though he was using this parable for spiritual purposes, it goes without saying that Christ knew a thing or two about the cost of doing business. Whether your business is actually *building a tower* or providing drycleaning services, it always pays to sit down and count the cost.

It may be tempting to think an equipment manufacturer could never relate to the costs associated with being a drycleaner. After all, I convert purchased raw materials into a finished product, whereas a drycleaner performs a service on a product they do not own. However, a discussion in a recent NCALC Zoom meeting got me thinking about the three categories of cost that all businesses have in common: fixed costs, variable costs, and semi-variable costs.

Following is a brief description of each:

1) Fixed Costs. These costs are the expenses that do not

change, regardless of the volume of clothes you process.

Examples of these may include rent, property taxes, boiler inspections, liability insurance, franchise fees, and possibly even your salary as owner/operator. If business increases or decreases, these expenses remain the same.

Examples of these may include electricity and natural gas costs and payroll expenses.

What makes these expenses semi-variable (instead of variable) is the fact that there is not always a direct correlation between business volume and the consumption of these resources.

this automatically **increases** your profitability.

Conversely, if sales decrease, it spreads your expenses over a lesser amount of income. Assuming all else is equal, this automatically **decreases** your profitability.

Next, let's look at your variable costs. This is where sales

be tempted to think utility costs and payroll expenses simply increase and decrease along with sales volume. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

There are multiple reasons for this — minimum monthly utility charges, energy required to heat up a boiler versus the energy required to maintain that same temperature, and utilities being consumed by both the cleaning process and to condition employee work spaces.

Just like fixed costs, when semi-variable costs are spread over an increased sales volume, this increases profitability, just not as significantly. The only way to keep semi-variable costs under control is to monitor them continuously and to keep improving the process.

In closing, the key takeaways are: 1) Due to so many fixed cost in an organization, increasing your volume is the quickest way to increase overall profitability; 2) Continually managing and improving your process is the key to driving down your variable and semi-variable costs; and 3) Always take time to *count the cost*.

Just like fixed costs, when semi-variable costs are spread over an increased sales volume, this increases profitability just not as significantly. The only way to keep semi-variable costs under control is to monitor them continuously and to keep improving the process.

2) Variable Costs. These costs are the expenses that directly correlate with your volume of business.

Examples of these may include soap, chemicals, hangers and poly bags. If you process more clothes, these expenses go up; if you process less clothes, these expenses go down.

3) Semi-variable Costs. These costs are the expenses that only partially change as business volume changes.

As a small business, it's tempting to lump all costs into one expense category. However, by diving deeper into these categories, we can see how each affect profitability.

First, let's look at your fixed costs. Increasing your sales while holding fixed costs (rent, property taxes, liability insurance and your salary) has the effect of spreading out these expenses over a greater amount of income.

Assuming all else is equal,

volume makes very little difference in your profitability per piece. However, don't be fooled into thinking that you can relax in this area.

On the contrary, *every* incremental improvement in your process affects the cost of *every* single garment that you clean. Reducing the cost of your soap, chemicals, hangers, and poly bags affects the profitability of thousands of garments every single month.

Eliminating waste and improving your process has incredible benefits to your profitability. So, don't neglect your process!

Finally, let's consider the trickiest cost to evaluate — semi-variable costs. You might

Rusty Smith is the president and CEO of Forenta, designer and manufacturer of a wide range of finishing equipment. The company is headquartered in Morristown, TN.



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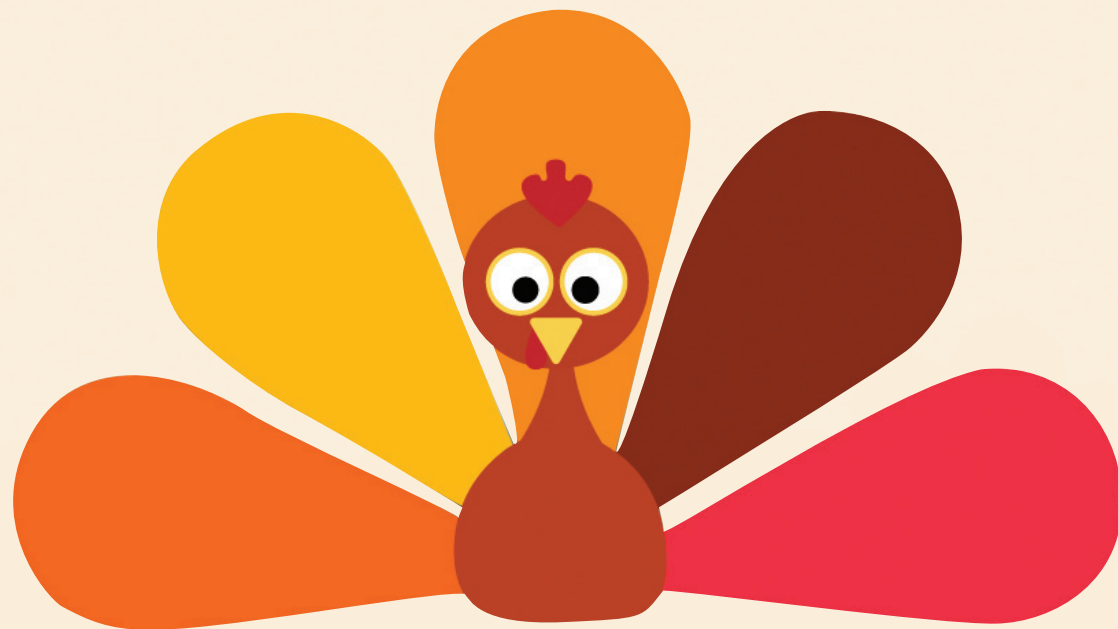


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James Peuster (pictured on right) expanded **The Route Pros** training at the Kansas City facility as he welcomed three more graduates. This round was focused on Wash-Dry-Fold sales and included the following (from left to right): **Ludwin Gamez** from Fox Cleaners in Tulsa; **Cassie Quintero** from Laundry Express in Andover, Kansas; and **Stephani McGrath** from JL2U in Kansas City. "We continue to expand training for operations, customer, service, leadership, and now we include Wash-Dry-Fold workshops," Peuster said. "It was fun, educational as we learned off each other."



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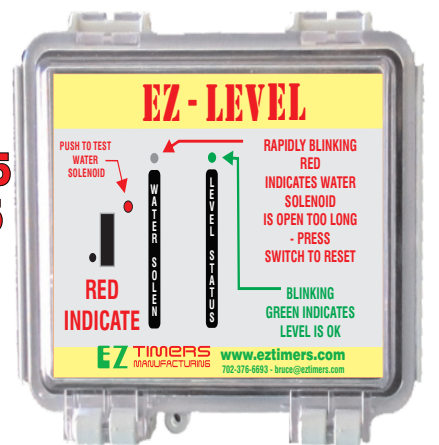
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