



# TIME TO AIR THE LAUNDRY?

Q+A: Pros, cons of in-house, outsourced linen services

**L**audrery is one of the most important functions in a hotel and it is often the subject of great debate. There are those who purport on-premises operations provide the best service while others believe outsourcing laundry is the better bet. Here, Rocco Romeo of HLS Linen Services discusses the good and bad of both and weighs in on whether a combination of the two is ever a viable option.

## **What are the advantages of handling hotel laundry in-house?**

The main advantage is being able to control the timing of washing and delivery, which results in a faster turnaround time of linen. A hotel can determine the order of items to be washed and processed as well as when they are to be laundered and even run laundry operations 24-hours, if required, which is not always possible if outsourced. A hotel can also carry a lower linen par level if laundering in-house since it does not have to take delivery and laundry time into account as is the case with outsourced operations; however, this creates other challenges such as more frequent replacement of linen.

## **Are there disadvantages?**

There are many disadvantages to laundering in-house including equipment maintenance and capital replacement, which can be costly. Additionally, on-premises laundry is often more labour intensive and expensive to run due to lack of automation. Overtime costs can be significant during times of high hotel occupancy or equipment breakdown. If equipment does breakdown, it can wreak havoc very quickly because many on-site laundry fa-

cilities only have one or two of each piece of equipment. Lower par levels, which are common with on-premises laundry, also lead to more frequent linen replacement, resulting in higher costs over time.

## **What are the benefits of outsourcing laundry?**

There are many benefits including reduced capital expenditures, reduced labour costs and a reduction in maintenance and utility costs, the latter of which is typically significant with on-site laundry operations. Additionally, outsourcing laundry allows hotels to focus on core competencies instead of issues associated with operating a laundry facility. It also offers the opportunity to partner with companies that have the latest equipment and wash formulas to ensure linen life is maximized. Reliability is another benefit. Most external laundry service providers have redundancy in equipment (many of the same equipment to increase reliability) in case one machine needs to be repaired, so processing is not affected.

## **Are there any drawbacks?**

The drawbacks are not having control over laundry operations and having to wait the 24-hour turnaround time for linen. Since a hotel doesn't control the timing of washing and delivery, it also needs to increase the par level of its linen inventory, which costs more in the short-term.

## **What should a hotel consider when selecting an external laundry service provider?**

The hotel should consider the location of the external laundry service provider

to ensure deliveries can be made in a timely manner, as well as the size of the provider's fleet and whether it can accommodate the hotel loading docks. Hours of operation, turnaround time (24 hours or less) and delivery time are also important. Usually evening or early morning delivery is best to ensure all soiled linen is picked up and returned within 24 hours.

It's advisable to tour the external laundry service facility before signing a contract. Inspect equipment and take stock of the number of each piece of equipment to ensure breakdown won't hamper operations. Find out what type of preventative maintenance program is in place and the quality control measures employed to ensure health, hygiene and safety.

Once a contract is in hand, review before signing. It should include items such as delivery and pickup times, rewash protocols, damaged or unusable linen protocols and sorting protocols for pickup and delivery.

## **Are there any instances when a mixture of both may be the best option?**

A situation where a hotel sources out high volume items such as sheets, towels, bath mats and face cloths, and then internally launders specialty items such as shower curtains or low par level items does have some advantages. The specialty items can be handled with more care on-site than at an external laundry service facility. Usually these items require special handling and are more expensive to outsource for cleaning. /