



National

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We'll meet again



Scenes like this seem to be from a distant past, but it was just one year ago this month that the industry gathered for the Clean Show in New Orleans. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the cancellation of many industry gatherings, including regional trade shows planned by the Southwest Drycleaners Association in Ft. Worth in April and the South Eastern Fabricare Association show planned for this month in Kissimmee FL. It remains to be seen if other regional trade shows will be able to go on as planned. The Clean Show is still on track for next June in Atlanta. As the old song goes, "We'll meet again some sunny day."

EPA draft sees no need for action on perc "at this time"

The Environmental Protection Agency released its draft risk evaluation for perchloroethylene, continuing a review process that began several years ago under the Toxic Substances Control Act.

Perc was one of 10 chemicals EPA chose for review in December 2016. Being on the list does not mean EPA intends to ban perc or even further regulate it. However, it opens the door to further consideration. Publication of the document on April 27 began a 60-day period in which the agency will receive comments that could lead to further rulemaking.

In its draft risk evaluation, EPA reviewed several commercial and consumer uses of perchloroethylene and made preliminary findings on whether using it can cause unreasonable risks to human health or the environment.

"The risks found in the draft risk evaluation, including those associated with this chemical's use in drycleaning, are preliminary and do not require any action at this time," EPA said. However, EPA said, the risks may change based on comments received from the public and peer reviewers.

The draft risk evaluation and the initial risk determinations are not a final action and represent the agency's preliminary conclusions, findings, and determinations on perchloroethylene. The draft risk

evaluation includes input from other EPA offices as well as other federal agencies.

EPA's draft risk evaluation preliminarily found unreasonable risk to workers, occupational non-users, consumers, bystanders, and the environment from certain uses. The primary health risk in the draft risk evaluation is neurological effects from short- and long-term exposure to the chemical. Some possible risk to consumers from perc's use in drycleaning would be from skin exposure to items cleaned with perchloroethylene.

The agency also found environmental risks to aquatic organisms.

The agency noted that the use of perc in drycleaning has been decreasing as facilities shift to new technologies and other solvents. EPA believes about 60 percent of drycleaning facilities use perc now, down from more than 80 percent in the early 1990s.

Nearly 65 percent of the production volume of perc is used as an intermediate in manufacturing, fluorinated compounds, such as hydrofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons alternatives to chlorofluorocarbons and HCFCs, which are ozone depleting, EPA noted. Drycleaning accounts for the second highest usage of perc in the U.S. at about 15 percent, EPA said.

Seeking recovery – and forgiveness

After a brutal month of April that saw business off as much 80 percent from a year ago, drycleaners were witnessing a recovery of sorts in May in which business "improved" to a level of 65 to 70 percent off year ago figures as people began slowly emerging from a virtual lockdown in the face of the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Government ordered shutdowns of business that were beginning to loosen in May didn't effect most cleaners directly since they were generally deemed essential and allowed to remain open. But being open did not equate to having business. Many people were working from home, perhaps in pajamas and bathrobes, and many others were out of work completely, so the need to maintain a professional wardrobe vanished. Gatherings that would draw crowds of well-dressed people, weddings for example, were not taking place.

Cleaners scrambled to develop new revenue streams, such as making face masks that suddenly became must-have items even for simple trips to the grocery store. Others tried to build on existing revenue streams, such as wash-dry-fold services or home pick-up and delivery. There was business to be had, but one had to find ways to go get it.

And would there be enough to keep employees busy? That became a key question as cleaners grappled to come to terms with the Paycheck Protection Program that granted money in the form of loans to companies to keep employees on the payroll. The loans would be forgiven if an employer could show that the money was indeed used to pay employees.

Under the terms of the PPP, if 75 percent of the funds received are used for payroll costs, the loan would be forgiven. In addition to payroll, loan money can also be used for interest on mortgages, rent, and utilities, but least 75 percent of the forgiven amount must have been used for payroll.

Therein lies the dilemma for

drycleaners. To qualify for forgiveness, they must remain fully staffed, but with business off so dramatically, the usual work is not there for employees to do.

The PPP loans are intended to cover eight weeks of payroll. An employer who received PPP loans and then re-hired workers previously laid off as a result of the crisis would not be penalized for having a reduced payroll, but in some cases laid-off employees might be reluctant to return to work. In addition to unemployment compensation, they were also getting an additional \$600 a week which could make staying at home more profitable than going to work.

If an employee refuses to return to work, the employer may not be on the hook for that portion of the loan. The Small Business Administration said that if an employer makes a good-faith effort to rehire an employee and can document the employee's rejection of that offer, the employee will be excluded from the forgiveness calculation.

Also, borrowers can obtain "safe harbor" from forgiveness reduction if they can show that by June 30, they restored their workforce to the level in place on Feb. 15.

In May, the SBA released an 11-page loan forgiveness application with instructions on how to complete it. While the document clarified a number of administrative queries, such as when, exactly, does the eight-week covered period begin, it fails to address several key issues. Those include whether bonuses can count as cash compensation, and how quickly forgiveness will work.

The SBA said it would "soon" issue regulations and guidance to further assist borrowers and lenders. There's no timeline for this next release.

For businesses that got in early and received their PPP loan in April, the process of seeking forgiveness will begin soon. The eight-week covered period begins

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Stay in touch with your customers and be ready for the reopening of business, advises association executive Peter Blake.



10 An essential service

Drycleaners' services have been deemed essential during the shutdown. Pickup and delivery is essential to provide that service.



16 Steps for reopening

Frank Kollman offers practical and legal considerations for cleaners as they plan for a full reopening of business.



20 Cleaning by hand

Even if the label says "Do Not Dryclean or Wash," you can still clean it, says Dan Eisen.



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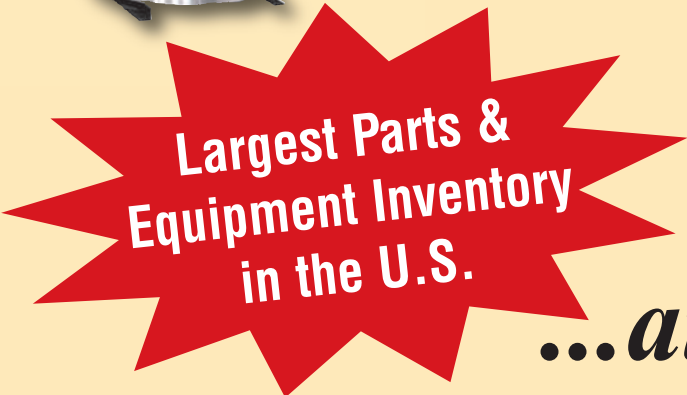
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June, 2020
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A clothes-wearing public still needs you

Business casual just got a heck of a lot more casual. Corporate America replaced power suits with sweat pants for a grueling couple of months as the drycleaning industry felt the pandemic’s economic devastation firsthand. It has been pushed to its brink as widespread national unemployment and telecommuting virtually eliminated a need for a majority of drycleaning. For those still waiting for finer fashion to make a comeback, COVID-19 may have dashed all hopes.

After so many Americans were forced to work from home in the past couple of months, ZDNet recently reported results from a 2020 remote work study, which revealed that there was only a one percent reduction on work productivity. Considering that many workers had the added distractions of kids home from school during a stressful pandemic while trying to find food and toiletries when shelves were consistently empty, that’s quite impressive. It seems that working from home agrees with many out there, as well: 40 percent of the workers polled said they would prefer to work remotely at home full time in the future. It’s becoming more and more likely that the future for drycleaning will include a lot less drycleaning.

The hit might not just be relegated to professional attire, either. People miss going out on weekends to concerts and events, which will continue on, of course, but it’s hard to imagine that the pandemic won’t cut back drastically on the overall attendance numbers for the foreseeable future. People will wear their favorite outfits still when they go out, but the problem is that they might go out less frequently. It seems logical to conclude that there will be spikes of social gatherings in the wake of the removal of stay-at-home orders, but overall, events may be cancelled or less populated for years to come if/when COVID-19 cases suddenly spike.

The ZDNet study indicated that three biggest concerns for employees regarding a “return to normal work life” are: family (44 percent), job security (46 percent) and workplace health and safety (51 percent). As stewards of a higher standard of cleaning, you are in a fortunate position to help your customers with that first fear by keeping the family’s clothes, carpets, curtains and other household items cleaner than they could do themselves.

If the last couple of months have taught us anything (apart from proper hand-washing techniques and the importance of buying hygiene products in bulk), it’s that pickup and delivery is no longer a “special” service; it’s an absolute necessity. It also taught us that people value their time even more when they cannot spend as much of it doing the things they enjoy. People still don’t want to spend precious time doing laundry, and now there is an even higher premium being placed on cleanliness and hygiene. There is still a market out there for drycleaners who are willing to adapt to meet the new needs of customers.

Invention really is a necessity

If it’s true that necessity is the mother of invention, we will be seeing a whole lot of inventiveness in the days and months ahead. The necessity is quite plain. Business has been way down over the past few months and the likelihood of it returning to pre-COVID levels is slim to none over the next few months. Drycleaners, like hundreds of thousands of businesses, are in a struggle for survival and can’t wait for an upswing in business to save them.

So invent we must. We’re seeing signs of that already. New ways of serving customers without that personal touch that so often defines the relationship between cleaners and clients are being discovered. It might involve curbside pickup (“Please honk for service” is one sign we saw at a cleaners). Maybe it’s calling customers to ask if they’d like clothes picked up or dropped off at their homes (at least most everybody is home these days). Or it might mean installing lockers for 24-hour service.

Diminishing drycleaning volume does not mean people don’t have clothes that need cleaning. You can clean anything, can’t you? Do you really care if a garment goes through a drycleaning machine or a washer? Even if you do, your customers probably don’t. What your customers want is to get their clothes cleaned conveniently. Whether they come back on a hanger and covered in poly or in a neatly sorted bundle is not the issue. So if you haven’t already, consider re-inventing yourself to accommodate what the market needs and wants.

Many cleaners noticed a big demand for masks that have become required wear in many public spaces. Those who had the capability jumped on it and found themselves turning out a product that three months ago nobody even thought about. It may not be a long-term need (at least we hope not), but it supplies a demand that will leave a feeling of gratitude if you can fulfill it and that should carry over long after the need subsides. You’re not just making masks; you are making new customers. If you can give masks away to people who need them, you’re also building community goodwill.

And how does that work? You have to let people know about it. It seems that people are spending a lot more time on social media these days, so get on Facebook and let them know what you offer. We see local restaurants doing this on community Facebook pages all the time. (And that’s a business that is really strapped in these shutdown times.) People are excited to learn where they can get the things they want and how to go about getting them.

Maybe because restaurant owners really have their backs against the wall they have been quicker to do this. As a drycleaner, if you don’t feel your back against a wall, good for you. We doubt there are many who feel that comfortable, yet we haven’t seen any drycleaners posting their offerings on our local community Facebook page. We have seen people asking about which cleaners are open; it seems some folk are feeling a need for alterations these days.

You say there is no Facebook page for your community? Invent one. It’s not hard.

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

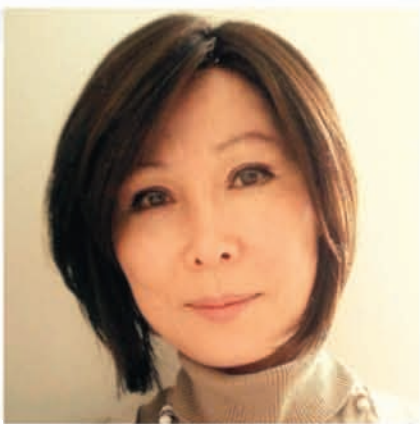


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Stay in touch with customers

Brand awareness and marketing

BY PETER BLAKE

Last month I outlined some of my thoughts and ideas as we all plan the grand re-opening of the country and our industry. Our first reaction to financial crisis and uncertainty is to cut back, eliminate expenses, conserve capital, and put a hold on all those things we feel we can do without.



Peter Blake

I am sure you have all explored those thoughts, made some tough decisions, and have already put together your emergency response plan for navigating the new COVID-19 landscape.

Be forewarned, times of economic uncertainty are *not* the time to cut back on your marketing and brand awareness. One of your first instincts might be to cut back or eliminate your advertising budget and wait until times get better before reinvesting, but trust me, that is one of the biggest mistakes you can make.

These are the times when you need to *increase* your marketing efforts. This is the time when you need to explore new vehicles to help drive your brand. The last thing you want to do is find yourself behind the curve as business evolves and picks up again, and you are fighting to play catch-up.

Now is the time to seize opportunity and solidify your company's position in the community. This global pandemic is affecting everyone and purchasing decisions will be influenced by how your customers, and potential customers, view your business today and in the future. Keep in mind, effective marketing doesn't have to be expensive, but it does take some investment. If not financial, then an investment of time and effort for sure.

As I wrote in a previous article, communication is everything. If you want to stay relevant you need to connect with your customer base and let them know you are open and ready to help.

A recent marketing study done by the American Association of Advertising Agencies found that 43 percent of consumers find it reassuring to hear from companies they know and use, another 40 percent wanted to know how brands are responding to the COVID-19 crisis, and only 15 percent of consumers said they did not want to hear from brands at this time. That is an overwhelming majority that want to hear from you. They want to know what you are offering and what you are doing to help people feel safe and secure.

Your messaging needs to start with empathy. I have said it before, "We all may not be in the same boat, but we are all in the same storm." I know you are struggling, but so are your cus-

tomers. Marketing in these times requires sensitivity to what is going on in your customers' lives

those messages out? Every way you possibly can. There is no right or wrong answer, but in today's

cently helped a cleaner develop and send an email to her customer base for the first time. It was sent

As I end this column, I want to give you one tangible concept you can use in your business for your

One of your first instincts might be to cut back your advertising budget and wait for better times but that is one of the biggest mistakes you can make.

and needs to be flexible to handle the changing landscape.

I would focus on ways you are changing and adapting to keep customers safe. Let them know what safety measures you have taken, including both internally for your staff and for your customers' protection.

This would include physical changes to remove touch points like new "sneeze guards" installed at the front counter; moving credit card terminals closer to the consumer; and new safety requirements like requiring all employees to wear masks when interacting both at the counter and on a route.

In addition, mandating employees to wear gloves when doing pick-ups and deliveries or working the counter is a good practice.

I would include information about the safety of the process itself and how professional cleaning is far better than home laundry in protecting against the spread of the virus and other bacteria. The CDC recommends high heat as the best way to combat COVID viruses. We wash, dryclean, and press at much higher temperatures than home laundry can achieve. I would take advantage of this information and let customers know we can do it better and offer more protection for them and their family.

You also need to educate your customers on your complete menu of services, including some of your new services you have embraced since the pandemic started. If you didn't offer Wash-Dry-Fold before, but you do now, I would venture to guess your customers don't even know it. Offering pick-up and delivery? If it is a new service for you, you need to get the word out in every way possible. I would also suggest highlighting some of the more profitable services that are not used enough such as comforters, curtains, and other household items.

As we have already seen from reports from our members, blankets, comforters, and other household items have created a small uptick in business.

These items are often neglected and cleaned too infrequently. To better protect their safety, recommend that they clean these items at least one or two times per week. These items are being breathed on, snored on, and coughed on all night long.

Look at the garments you are getting in now, they are a great indicator of what you can highlight to other customers and potential customers.

What is the best way to get

world you need to be flexible, versatile, and innovative.

Leverage social media

I would use social media as much as possible, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other platforms. I would recommend you post anywhere from one to three times per week. I would use video and images as much as possible. We are a visual



society and images and video are always more effective to get your messages across.

I strongly urge you to take advantage of some of the low-cost, highly effective advertising opportunities these social media platforms can provide. You can tailor your messages and posts to a very selective audience, and then market your promotions to that audience. I recently did a webinar for association members that demonstrated how to do this, and the program is archived at dlionline.org.

I invite anyone reading this article to email me for a free link to that presentation for more detailed information. Just mention you saw it in NATIONAL CLOTHESLINE.

Use your email addresses

This is an opportunity to tell your story, share your experiences and to solidify your connection with your customers. Email customers at least once a month with information, and maybe twice a month if you want to promote a special or service.

Email marketing remains an effective way to communicate with your current customers. I re-

cently helped a cleaner develop and send an email to her customer base for the first time. It was sent

I would target my email as a reward for their loyalty: "Because you are one of our best customers," and "Special offer for our VIP Customers" are some taglines you can use.

best route customers or your best "over the counter" customers.

Look for a good, higher ticket item with a decent profit margin like a comforter. Print up a nice gift certificate: "Pete's Cleaners Recognizes Heath Care Providers! As a thank you for your service, please redeem for One FREE Comforter Cleaning."

Then send them home with your best customers or send/give



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Always include a thank you for their business and trust. Make it as personal as possible. One of the most frequent questions I get is about content creation and there are some great resources available to help you come up with content.

There are a number of companies that can do this for you, and DLI is building an impressive library of graphics, posts, and brochures you can use to communicate with your customers. If you don't have the time to do it yourself, outsource it. But it is vital that you remain in contact with your customers and community. If you need help with your email newsletters or program, email me or call and I can help you develop your program.

Word of mouth marketing

Never underestimate the voice of your customers. We have all heard of referral programs and many cleaners have used them with varying levels of success. One of the shifts in marketing and brand messaging is the need to stress stories, safety, trust and your commitment to the community.

to your route customers asking them to *give them to someone they know* in their neighborhood. Make it special, and make it look like an honor and something they would want to gift someone. You can create a nice card with the instruction telling them you want their help in identifying people they know who are providing great care and service to others.

The customer is giving a friend or neighbor something of value. You are getting a subtle referral and a potential new customer. You are also reminding your own customers to clean their comforters and reinforcing the idea of sending them to you. It is a win-win-win situation.

Worst case scenario? You give a bunch of free comforter cleanings to people who are caring for the sick and can use help. Besides, it is a great way to give all your PPP employees something to do.

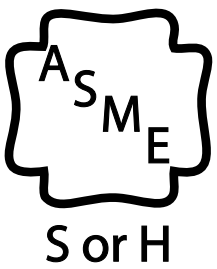
Peter Blake serves as executive director of the North East Fabricare Association, the Southeastern Fabricare Association, the MidAtlantic Association of Cleaners and the California Cleaners Association.

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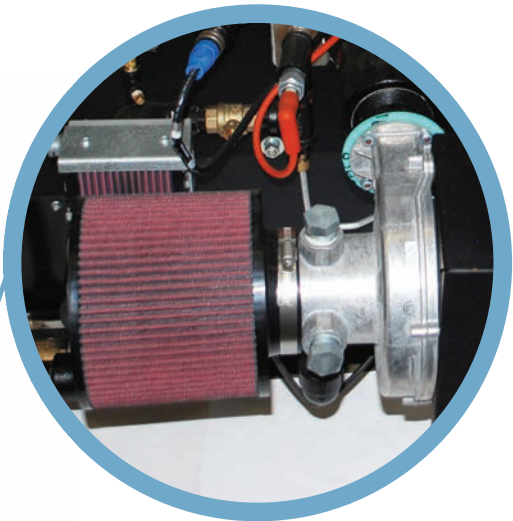
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Seeking recovery – and forgiveness

Continued from page 1

when the loan funds reach a borrower's account. That may not make sense for businesses whose pay periods do not correspond to that loan disbursement date.

For example, the SBA said that if a business owner received PPP loan proceeds on Monday, April 20, and the first day of the company's next pay period begins Monday, April 27, that constitutes the first day of the "alternative" payroll. The alternative payroll covered period does not apply to non-payroll costs.

Businesses won't have to contort their normal bill-paying and payroll processes to conform with PPP.

For business owners who pay rent on the first of the month but didn't get their PPP disbursement until mid-month, the forgiveness loan application says eligible, non-payroll costs must be paid during the eight-week covered period or incurred during that time and paid on or before the next regular billing date, even if the billing date is after the covered period.

Similarly, eligible payroll costs

incurred but not paid during the eight-week period are covered if paid on or before the next regular payroll date.

And what constitutes those payroll costs?

SBA said that payroll costs are calculated on a gross basis without regard to federal taxes imposed or withheld, such as the employee's and employer's share of Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) and income taxes required to be withheld from employees.

As a result, payroll costs are not reduced by taxes imposed on

an employee and required to be withheld by the employer, but payroll costs do not include the employer's share of payroll tax.

For example, an employee who earned \$4,000 per month in gross wages, from which \$500 in federal taxes was withheld, would count as \$4,000 in payroll costs. The employee would receive \$3,500, and \$500 would be paid to the federal government. However, the employer-side federal payroll taxes imposed on the \$4,000 in wages are excluded from payroll costs under the

statute.

The process of sorting all this out is likely to be a long one. Cleaners have been advised to keep careful records of how they use the PPP money and be ready to report in great detail when they apply for forgiveness.

They will not be alone. As of May 16, SBA said more than 4.3 million PPP loans totaling more than \$513 billion dollars had been approved. More than two-thirds of the loans were for \$50,000 or less. Overall, the average loan size was \$118,000.

Groups finding meeting alternatives

With coronavirus restrictions on travel and group gatherings, industry groups are opting to hold

meetings online instead of outright cancellations.

Methods for Management said

it is using video conferencing platforms like Zoom so members of its consulting groups can connect to their scheduled meetings from any location and interact with one another in the same way a person-to-person meeting would work. The agenda and format of the meeting can remain relatively the same as a typical on-location meeting would work, MFM said.

In addition to its second quarter scheduled meetings, the group is having weekly all-member Zoom meetings, where concerns and strategies regarding navigating through COVID-19 can be discussed and shared between members.

"Given our current climate, we're seeing that now more than ever, and our members need the support and camaraderie these meetings can offer," MFM said,

adding that it will continue to remain in close contact with members and will seek creative ways to stay connected, informed, and up-to-date daily.

MFM is facilitated by Kermit Engh who has been an owner/operator in the drycleaning industry for over 28 years and a member of MFM for more than 24 years. MFM's website is www.methodsformanagement.com.

Cancellation of its spring affiliate meeting didn't stop affiliates of America's Best Cleaners from gathering, at least virtually.

The spring meeting, which was to be hosted by Puritan Cleaners in Richmond, VA, instead turned into a Happy Hour hosted over Zoom for all ABC affiliates who gathered to grab a friendly drink and stay connected although apart.

ABC was set to mark its 20th anniversary at the meeting and expected it to be the best attended in its history.

"One of the biggest disappointments of the COVID-19 crisis thus far has been the inevitable postponement of the ABC spring affiliate meeting," ABC said. "Regardless, the celebration will be rescheduled for later in the year once the curve has flattened. The safety of every ABC affiliate is paramount, so postponing the

meeting was a difficult but necessary decision."

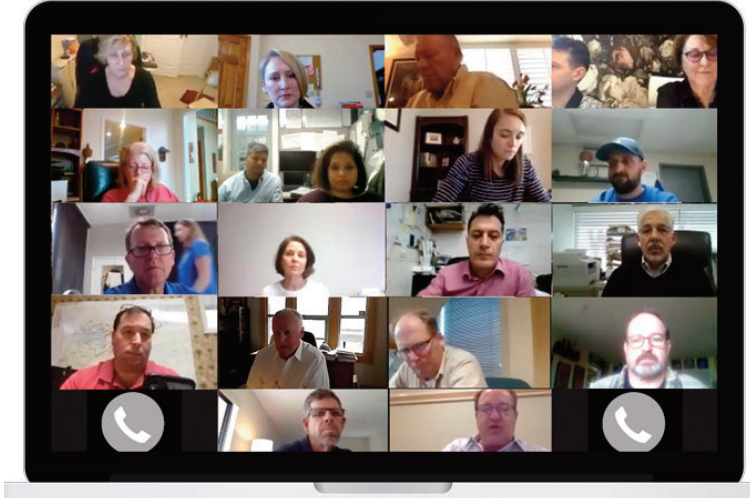
Crystal Doaifi of ABC affiliate Power Cleaners in Lake Forest, CA, lauded ABC's leadership.

"When COVID-19 hit and business slowed down drastically, it really took a toll on our company spirit," she said. "Having the opportunity to be a part of America's Best Cleaners is rewarding in the best of times. But this crisis really showed us what the group is all about, she said.

Chris White, ABC executive director, started weekly Zoom meetings as a group to discuss issues, collaborate on ideas, and so on.

"It changed our entire perspective. We no longer felt alone — we had a group of people who came together to innovate faster than ever before. Simply just talking about concerns with people who can relate to the industry made all the difference. Honestly without this group, without our weekly meetings, and without the motivation and support that everyone provides every day of this crisis, we would have felt much worse," she said.

ABC is an independent certification organization for the drycleaning industry. For more information, visit www.americasbestcleaners.com.



With restrictions of gatherings and travel difficult, industry groups like Methods for Management and America's Best Cleaners have turned to online meetings on platforms like Zoom.

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SDA hopes to meet in Austin next month

The Southwest Drycleaners Association is planning to host a membership meeting and seminar in July — emphasis on the word planning. Nothing is set in stone in the Covid Age.

For now, the group is asking its members to save the date. As for travel arrangements — those can wait — until closer to the event, anyway. It is scheduled to take place from July 10 to 11 at the Lone Star Court in the Domain in Austin, TX.

As of press time, the city of Austin had enacted a Shelter in Place Order set to expire on May 30; Travis County in Texas currently plan to remove its Shelter in Place Order on June 15. That means Austin should be a viable meeting location in July. Still, this can change at any time so those who plan on attending should RSVP to the association for the free event, but nobody is advised to make definite travel plans or hotel reservations yet.

SDA will inform those who have signed up when to do so.

Those who find themselves ready to return to social events could not ask for a much better facility. The Lone Star Court is a stylish, boutique hotel offering a retro atmosphere with a modern twist.

SDA's event will kick off on Friday evening with a Happy Hour Welcome Reception at 5:30 p.m. before dinner at the Domain at 7 p.m.

On Saturday morning, there will be breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and an SDA Board meeting at 9 a.m. Following a noon lunch, the seminar will take place at 1:30 p.m.

Look for updates as they become available at SDA's website at www.sda-dryclean.com.

You can also contact the office directly at (512) 873-8195.

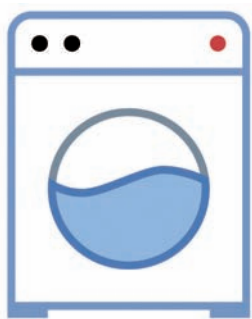
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

To all the essential workers out there (including dry cleaners!) giving it everything they've got, every hour of every day, to see us through this crisis, we thank you for your service!

Many thanks for the support & timely information from our Industry Associations and Trade Publications!



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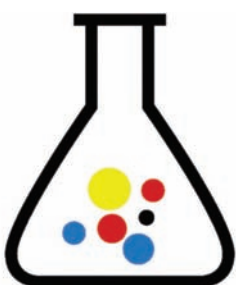
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THE ROUTE PRO



BY JAMES PEUSTER

Making the best of the new normal

Number one question I get asked is what should we be doing now to prepare for the “new normal?” If I had the answer to this million-dollar question, I

would have a million dollars! The truth of the matter is that we really don’t know the exact answer, but if history serves, we can be prepared to move forward no matter what

that looks like. One concern is that many will not be returning back to work soon: some because it is ordered and others due to choice.

Los Angeles extended its stay-at-home order three months. Kansas City invoked a 10-10-10 rule that many are scratching their heads at. Georgia opened back up.

No matter where you are, the key is to go where the customers are and find creative ways to service them. Those without routes are way behind things now. You need to get focused on starting a route.

Another concern is the continual social distancing and safety precautions that all businesses are having to adapt to. It’s like our counter will need to look like a buffet line with plexiglass shields all around and sanitizer options everywhere.

While the great mask/gloves debate is going on, we all need to at least acknowledge what consumers see and fear. From route driving to store options, be cognizant of the world around us. Just don’t be too opportunistic.

Face-to-face sales versus virtual selling also needs to be looked at. Many say that selling is dead, but that is far from the truth. In-person selling will always produce better results and has always withstood the test of time. Be patient during this pandemic, but it will return sooner rather than later.

Routes in general are no longer just a choice. Many have delayed year after year only to watch their competition take away from their stores.

Many blamed 2008 while others simply lean on the excuse that drycleaning is diminishing. That’s the easy excuse to make.

Also, residential route development is a must now. Your drivers must do more than just drive. Hiring maintainers can only go so far.


The bottom line is that BC on our calendars has a second meaning — Before COVID. The most successful cleaners from now on will not hold on to the past but prepare for the future.

One thing I repeat from the lessons learned from 2008: those who cut back never fully recovered. Those who moved forward grew. It’s about as easy as that.



Doing nothing is easier, but a faster way to ensure that success is not around the corner.

James Peuster is a consultant who specializes in route development, management and maintenance. He offers onsite consulting as well as ongoing coaching across the country. He also has cost groups to monitor route efficiency. For information, call (816) 739-2066 or visit www.theroutepro.com.

**One thing I repeat from the lessons learned from 2008:
those who cut back never fully recovered.
Those who moved forward grew.**



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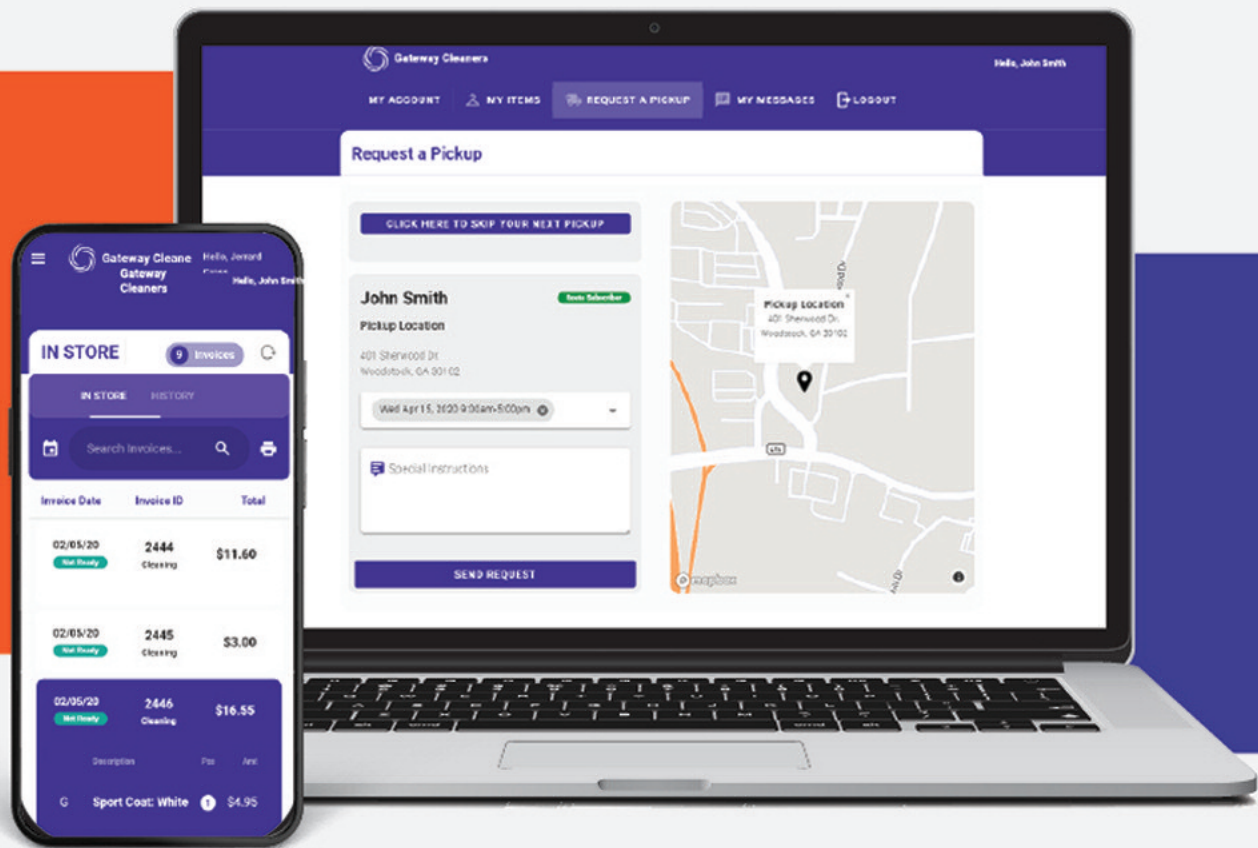


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SHIRT TALES



BY DON DESROSIERS

How incentive plans can backfire

I often get asked about incentives, bonuses and piece-rate pay. Are they a good idea? Well, it is not the same answer for everyone, so I can not make a blanket statement and say it's a great idea or it's a lousy one. At some plants, it is perfect, for others it will accomplish nothing. It is always about goals. What are you trying to accomplish? What is the path to your

goal? Where are you and where do you want to go? When I first started in management, I was asked about goals. "Goals? What goals?" I surely thought. It sounded a little too cosmic for me. Wait a minute! I have a goal! How about; "I want to get through this day without a catastrophe." That's my goal. Well, that is a rather silly goal, but I bet that I thought that it was a great one 40 years ago.

Back on track... I won't tell you that you should or should not implement incentives, bonuses or piece-rate pay, but I will give you something to think about that, hopefully, will help you make a decision. What are you trying to accomplish? Usually, management is trying to insulate itself from substandard production or dips in volume. It's a way to keep payroll in check. That is hardly the dumbest idea that I've ever heard. But will it

work? This works best when competition of sorts, is possible. For example, imagine two essentially identical shirt units – two conventional single buck units or two double units. The exact number of shirts that will be produced by this plant during this week is finite. Nobody knows exactly what this number is, but pressing shirts faster does not, of course, mean that there will be more shirts to press.

Usually, management is trying to insulate itself from substandard production or dips in volume. It's a way to keep payroll in check. That is hardly a dumb idea, but will it work?

Conversely, if your job is to manufacture shirts, working faster means that you can make more shirts. Theoretically, there is an endless supply of shirts to manufacture. Pressing shirts faster simply means that there will be less production hours. An hourly employee is wise to this. Assuming that service is not an issue, meaning that even if shirts are pressed at a rate that is 30 or 40 percent slower that the equipment is capable of producing, the customers are still served, if a presser presses more quickly, the net result for an employee is a smaller paycheck. This is a tough problem. How do you motivate employees to press faster so that they can get paid less? The easy answer is to never let it happen. It may already be way too late to implement that at your plant, but that doesn't make my statement any less correct. Anyhow, let's say that we have two competing shirt units and a total expected volume of 5,000 shirts. When piece pay is implemented, one team of pressers has a goal to press the lion's share of the available shirts. If I want to make more money than the other group, I want to press faster so that I can press 3,000 (of the available 5,000 shirts) versus the theoretical 50/50 split of 2,500 per shirt unit. As for avoiding under-producing pressers, the only solution is to set standards and expect them. It is wrong to allow underproducing on shirt pressing equipment with no penalty for non-compliance. Free money! A client in Tennessee has a policy in place to



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Don Desrosiers

How incentive plans can backfire

Continued from page 12

help guarantee attendance and limit tardiness. It doesn't work and he can hardly believe it. I was equally stunned that it didn't work when he first explained the policy to me. It has taken me a number of years to understand why it doesn't work.

His policy is simple: Show up for work, every day that you are scheduled, be there, on time, not even a minute late, and you will be paid for 40 hours. This, by the way, is good for him, but it is not necessarily a suggestion for you.

It makes sense for him for at least two reasons. If these two reasons apply to you, then this policy could make sense for you, too.

This drycleaner is a client and as a result, he runs very lean. Last I knew, he was still at 30 pieces per labor hour: two people on a double buck doing 90 excellent shirts per hour and one other person doing inspection, assembly, touch-up, buttons and wash.

There is a measure of wiggle room when you are at 30 pieces per labor hour. Therefore, he can afford to waste 10 to 15 labor hours and still have a PPOH number that is better than almost anybody's.

The second reason that this is a good plan for him is that he is already working close to 40 hours, year-round.

This would be a bad idea if all the shirts that he had to do could (or should) be done in, say 20 hours. Wasting an addi-

tional 20 hours to get good attendance is not good business. This would probably be very effective, however ill-advised.

So, in his case he will do 3,000 shirts this week with three people. Two will press at a rate of 90 shirts per hour. Let's call it 34 hours — 102 hours in total, counting all three staff members will yield a stellar 29.4 pieces per labor hour.

If the pressers are paid for 40 hours regardless (and remember, volume is quite steady year-round), the total hours will be 114 hours. Divide that into the same 3000 shirts and the PPLH is reduced to a still extraordinarily respectable 26.3. His pressers still come in late almost daily, but they get the job done and he takes his

29.4 PPLH to the bank. But why doesn't it work? It is free money!

There is a daycare center that had a problem with parents not showing up on time to pick up their children at the end of the day. It became quite a problem. The kids needed to be picked up at 3 p.m., but day after day, two or three parents were late.

The daycare center needed to remedy this so they instituted an incentive to get people to be there on time. If you weren't there to pick up your child by 3:05, you would be penalized \$3. What do you think happened? The tardiness went up. Way up, in fact. Almost everyone was late everyday!

The plan backfired. The "crime" was worth the penalty,

and the "crime" was endorsed, so to speak. "Go ahead and be late, just give us \$3." The parents of the children feel that the \$3 is less important than doing what it takes to be there on time. The same is true for my client in Memphis; the punishment does not fit the crime. It is not more complicated than that.

In the final analysis, know what you are trying to accomplish. Are you trying to reduce overtime? Are you trying to address service issues? Are you trying to reduce payroll proportionately with piece count?

Keep the examples that I put forth in mind and make sure that, in the end, you are the big winner.

I had a crisis years ago. I had to trim overtime and improve service. It did not take much investigating to clearly see that my pressers were underproducing.

Collectively, my shirt pressing equipment should be able to generate 475 shirts per hour, but I was getting around 360. The 100+ differential surely contained all of the potential profit.

I devised an elaborate sliding pay scale in an effort to boost productivity. The higher the productivity rate, the more an employee would make per hour. Seems like I worked on this for months. I analyzed it every which way, being sure that fraud wasn't possible, accounting wasn't too much of a nightmare and that I was always the biggest winner.

When I finally had a program that I was sure was perfect, what do you think that I did? I scrapped it and never implemented it, because I came to terms with the real problem. The real problem was that I had shift supervisors that allowed pathetic productivity and I had no penalty for non-compliance. That is not acceptable. Why would I want to reward employees for doing what they should have been doing all along?

If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you always got.

Don Desrosiers has been in the drycleaning and shirt laundering business since 1978. He is a work-flow engineer and a management consultant who provides services to shirt launderers and drycleaners through Tailwind Systems. He is a member of the Society of Professional Consultants and winner of DLI's Commitment to Professionalism award. He can be reached at 186 Narrow Ave., Westport, MA 02790 or at his office by fax (508) 636-8839; by cell (508) 965-3163; or e-mail at tailwindsystems@charter.net. The Tailwind web site is www.tailwindsystems.com.





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Bob Hamila (*Lighthouse Cleaners / Palm Beach Gardens, FL*)

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Stephanie Barrero (*Door2Door Drycleaners / Bluffton, SC*)

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Bill Wright (*Royal Fine Cleaners / Northport, AL*)

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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

Think and plan for your reopening

On a personal note, I continue to wear dress clothes, even when I telecommute. I am continuing to visit my drycleaner of choice, although the amount of clothing I am having cleaned is down somewhat.

Restaurant eating was a major contributor to my need to spot clean my pants and jackets. I know, however, that many drycleaners have drastically reduced staff, and some have shut down (at least cleaners with multiple locations). This month's column deals with what you need to consider as COVID-19 restrictions are eased or rolled back.

There are many practical and legal considerations to take into account as employers reopen and/or reintegrate employees into the workplace. A one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate — different variables and actions you have taken thus far will affect the who, what, where, and when regarding how you prepare to, and actually do, return to the workplace and/or expand on-site operations.

General principles

- Decisions should be made by a team, which can be small, with the goal being to consider a diversity of viewpoints. The primary decision maker is well served to have input from others not necessarily seeking his or her approval.
- Articulate the business reasons for returning to work in the context of health and safety. If appropriate, employ-

ees should be able to understand that restarting and reintegrating certain areas or departments before others is a prudent business action.

- Determine the number and type of employees who will return first. That may mean certain departments or key employees in each department will start the process.

- Check whether opening, especially in stages, has an adverse impact on certain protected groups. For example, are employees in the first department to open mostly men while departments whose employees are mostly women remain shut down. If so, reconsider the decision and if it remains the correct business action, articulate a legitimate, non-discriminatory reason for the impact.

- If you are considering an altered schedule, such as shorter days or fewer days per week, check the effect on wage and hour compliance. Pay attention to exempt employees and rules regarding advance notice prior to schedule and wage changes.

- Prepare and disseminate safety guidelines that are clear, direct, and in line with CDC, state, and local rules.

- Identify the contact person(s) whom the employees may contact. Provide that contact person(s) with other management sources who will provide support.

- Develop a crisp, factual letter to employees about the plan and safety guidelines. Send updates about any mate-

rial changes.

- If an employee refuses to return to work or does not show up as required, have a discussion with the employee. After talking with the employee, determine whether the offered reasons describe a protected status.

If so, accommodate the employee. If not, determine what action you intend to take if the employee does not comply. Communicate your position to the employee and follow it up in writing. Give notice of intended action and opportunity to comply.

- If you are separating employees from employment, determine whether a challenge to unemployment is appropriate.

- Keep all notes of interactions factual and pointed. Accurate, brief accounts are better than verbose narratives.

- Consult with counsel.

Initial considerations and planning

- Create a plan to reopen and reintegrate the workplace with consideration to the items on this checklist.

- Timing/Scope. Assess and decide how quickly you want and need to reopen, including whether a staggered reintegration is appropriate and feasible. If you will not reopen all at once, decide how the phased-in reintegration will work.

- Financial concerns. Conduct a financial health check and determine budget priorities. Include in your decision making the impact of tax cred-

its, tax deferrals, and/or loan forgiveness/repayment that will affect your operations. Document the impact of employment decisions on the financial health of your organization.

- Employment Decisions. Create a reinstatement/hiring plan supported by legitimate business reasons.

- If you have implemented layoffs, furloughs, or other reductions-in-force, decide the who, what, where, why, and when of the reintegration.

- Identify the decision makers that will decide which employees will be invited to return and when, the factors you will consider in determining who you will ask to return and when, and the employees, if any, who you will not ask to return (short term, intermediate term, and long term).

If there are any such employees, document your rationale so you can explain the legitimate business reason(s) for those decisions.

- Anticipate that there may be certain classes of employees (i.e., older workers, parents/guardians unable to access childcare, employees with underlying medical conditions) who may want to return to work, but cannot (or under advice of a health care provider should not) because of COVID-19-related reasons. Consider how you will reintegrate these workers when they are available.

- Assess legal risk of employment decisions related to employees who were on job

protected leave or receiving other accommodations when their employment terms changed.

- Determine whether you will modify employee pay/hours as part of the reintegration.

- Document your rehire/reinstatement plan, which includes the legitimate business reasons for making those decisions. Retain all records.

- Consider voluntary reintegration, if feasible, for your workforce.

- **Anticipate challenges.** Assess how your plan might be affected by external factors (i.e., known/unknown governmental orders, customers, vendors/suppliers, landlords).

- **Future layoffs, furloughs, reductions-in-force.** Plan ahead for future layoffs and similar decisions. Be aware of the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN Act) and similar state laws. These laws generally require covered employers to provide advance notice when there is a plant closing or layoff of a certain size. Always consult with counsel before closing a facility or implementing a mass layoff.

- **Make decisions based on objective criteria** (i.e., decision based on a specific business unit or location, decision to separate X% of the workforce based on seniority). If decisions rely on subjective criteria (i.e., "this employee is better than that employee"), retool that criteria into objective elements (e.g., attendance, skill, ability, knowledge, production numbers, etc.).

- **Review decisions prior to implementation** for potential adverse impact on identified minority or other protected groups.

- If you are offering severance agreements in connection with layoff decisions, you will likely need to provide at least 45 days for employees to consider the offer under the Older Worker Benefit Protection Act.

These are the primary employment considerations. There are many other practical considerations that are beyond the scope of this column. Do your research.

Frank Kollman is a partner in the law firm of Kollman & Saucier, PA, in Baltimore, MD. He can be reached by phone at (410) 727-4300 or fax (410) 727-4391. His firm's web site can be found at www.kollmanlaw.com. It has articles, sample policies, news and other information on employee/employer relations.

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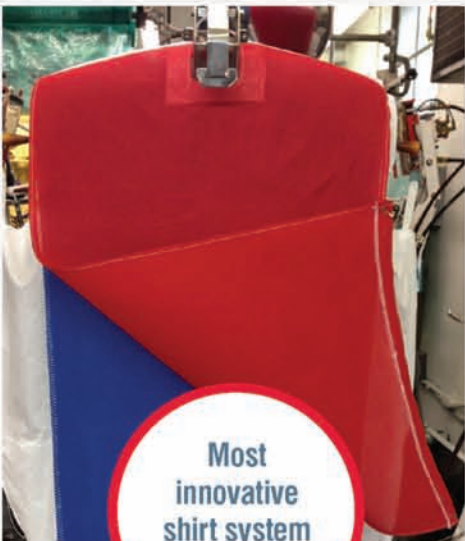
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WRENCH WORKS



By BRUCE GROSSMAN

Controlling water level in the boiler

Last month we took the necessary components and cobbled them together into a configuration that resembles a boiler.

In this installment we'll learn how the different components are organized into a system that maintains the proper water level inside the pressure vessel of your boiler.

For openers keep in mind that all the controls on your boiler serve only two functions:

- A. To turn a pump on or off.
 - B. To turn the fire on or off.
- That's it! Simple, just like a light switch toggling on or off.

Controlling the condensate return pump

Look at your boiler. Hanging somewhere off the side is a cylinder with a sight glass in it. This is the water column which provides a convenient place to monitor the water level in the pressure vessel.

It is attached to the pressure vessel at two points: above the desired water level in the steam storage area and well below the desired water level in the water storage area of the

pressure vessel so that the water level in the column is the same as the water level in the pressure vessel.

Screwed into the top of this cylinder are three probes that look like spark plugs. They are called water level probes or water level sensors.

These "spark plugs" have metal rods at the opposite ends called electrodes (metal rods that easily allow electric current to pass through them) which extend down into the water column.

When water touches the electrode, an electric current passes from the rod, through the water, to the metal of the water column signaling that the water is at the level of that probe.

The opposite holds true when the water level drops below the rod — the current flow is interrupted, sending a signal that there is no water at the level of that probe.

There are two probes controlling level operations (Pump off-1 and Pump On-2 pictured in the illustration).

These probes are used to

toggle the pump controller (3 in the illustration) on and off.

When the water level drops below the electrode on Pump On probe (probe 2 on the illustration) it signals the pump controller to send power to the condensate return pump, turning the pump on.

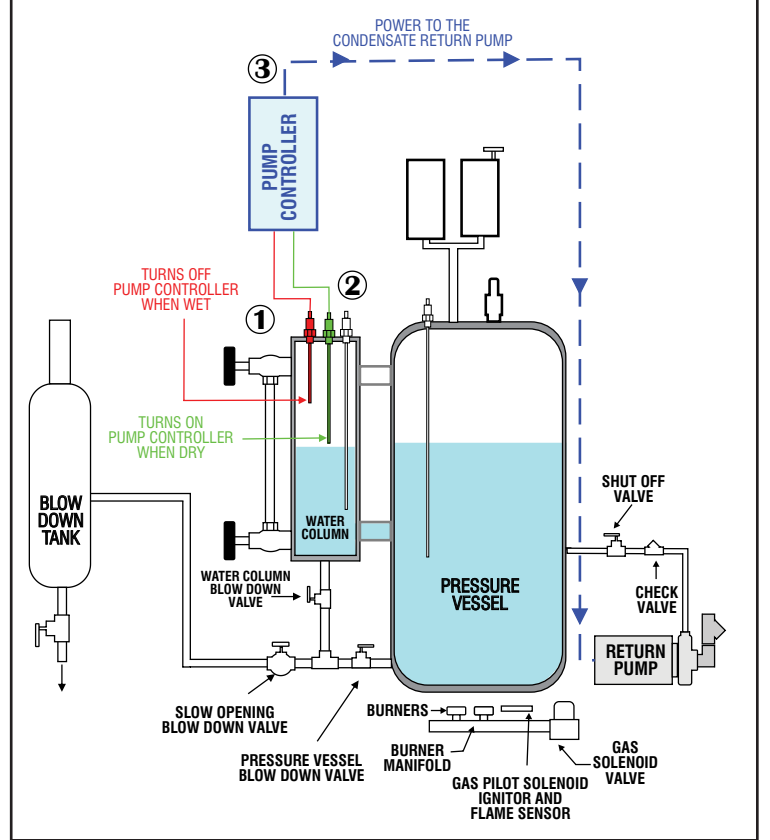
The pump will remain on until the water level rises to contact the Pump Off probe (probe 1 on the illustration) signaling the pump controller the proper water level has been reached, thereby shutting the condensate return pump off.

Pretty easy stuff, right? Believe it or not, that's it for controlling the pump. However, controlling the fire is another story which we will be exploring in next month's issue.

Here are a couple of ideas to ruminate over. On almost all controls for water level there are indicator lights telling you whether the probe is in contact with water.

Open the boiler control panel access door (on some doors there is an interlock switch that must be depressed

BUILDING A BOILER 3 CONDENSATE RETURN PUMP CONTROLS



or pulled out when the door is opened in order for the boiler to operate) and observe the operation of the indicator lights on a properly running boiler.

Shoot a video or make a chart showing the location of water level control and note whether the light is on or off during proper boiler operations. That way you will know if a level sensor is detecting a problem when the boiler fails to fire.

Also, most ignition controllers will have visible indicator lights, so make the same kind of observations to enable you to troubleshoot water level operations, perhaps saving an expensive, unnecessary service call.

There are few things sweeter in life than fixing

something yourself without making it worse.

Bruce Grossman is the chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing, maker of the EZ Level return tank water level control. To prevent boiler scaling and other damage, the EZ Level return tank water level control replaces that troublesome ball float valve in the condensate return tank. For saving money on handling waste the Sahara and Drop in the Bucket line of high purity separator water mister/evaporators provide a thrifty, legal method to get rid of the separator water generated by your drycleaning machine. For more information on EZtimers products, visit www.eztimers.com. Address any questions or comments to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.

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HOLLIDAY CLEANERS of Fort Lauderdale FL, installed a new Columbia drycleaning system with Intense solvent. Tim Holliday, the owner, is pictured with Rich Garland of Columbia Dry Cleaning Machines.



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THE SPOTTING BOARD



BY DAN EISEN

The rare art of hand cleaning

Milt & Edies Drycleaners in Burbank, California does more hand cleaning than most of my clients and probably most cleaners throughout the country.

This drycleaner handles many high-fashion garments from TV and movie studios as well as museums throughout the country. There are many high quality garments with intricate design that can not be immersed in water or drycleaning solvent.

Some of these garments are labeled "spot clean only" or "Do not dryclean or wash." It takes a great deal of skill to

clean these garments since the garment after spot cleaning must be free of stains, soil and odor.

The following is some of the new products and concepts that I have introduced. It is not enough to just use the product but you need to use the necessary skills to make it work.

Methods and products for hand cleaning

Folex carpet cleaner. This is a product that I introduced to many cleaners who have learned to use it effectively. This product contains a non-ionic detergent with an evapo-

rating agent. It is very effective as a localized spotting agent that can remove soil, wet and dryside stains.

If you spray it on properly and rub out the stain, it can be air dried with the spotting gun without leaving rings and residue of the product. Wedding Gown Preservation and Oceanside Cleaners are some of the cleaners that effectively use this product. Testing is necessary on some colored silk with dye limitations.

Neutral lubricant. The neutral lubricant you are using should be diluted to a concentration that can be easily

flushed out. Mix the product you are using diluted with four parts water.

Q-tips. In spot cleaning the q-tip is an invaluable aid. The q-tip can be saturated with a spotting agent and applied to the stain using rubbing and mechanical action. This avoids over saturating the area with a spotting agent.

Bleach stick. This agent can be obtained in a supermarket. It comes in a cream form and can be applied locally to small areas. It can only be used on white cotton, linen or rayon. Some white fabrics may need testing even though the con-

centration is marked safe.

Hydrogen peroxide. This can be purchased in a drug store as a spray. This bleach is very useful since it can be sprayed on a fabric and simply hung to dry. A 3 percent solution is considered safe for most fabrics and dyes.

When spraying a colored silk, two sprayings may be virtually safe but after several sprayings the color should be checked as it can affect some colors after repeated spraying. A 6% solution can be purchased in a hair salon in a cream form. The product needs to be tested before use.

Feathering. It is necessary to learn feathering if you are attempting to do hand cleaning. Feathering is necessary if you are using extensive chemicals for stain removal and soil. The staff at Milt & Edies are all adept in the practice of feathering.

After spotting an area, there can be extensive ringing from the liquid and chemicals used. Feathering means you break up the area with the steam gun and wipe the wet area outward so the wet area gradually blends into the dry area.

Feathering is more effective and faster than force drying the area with the steam gun and vacuum.

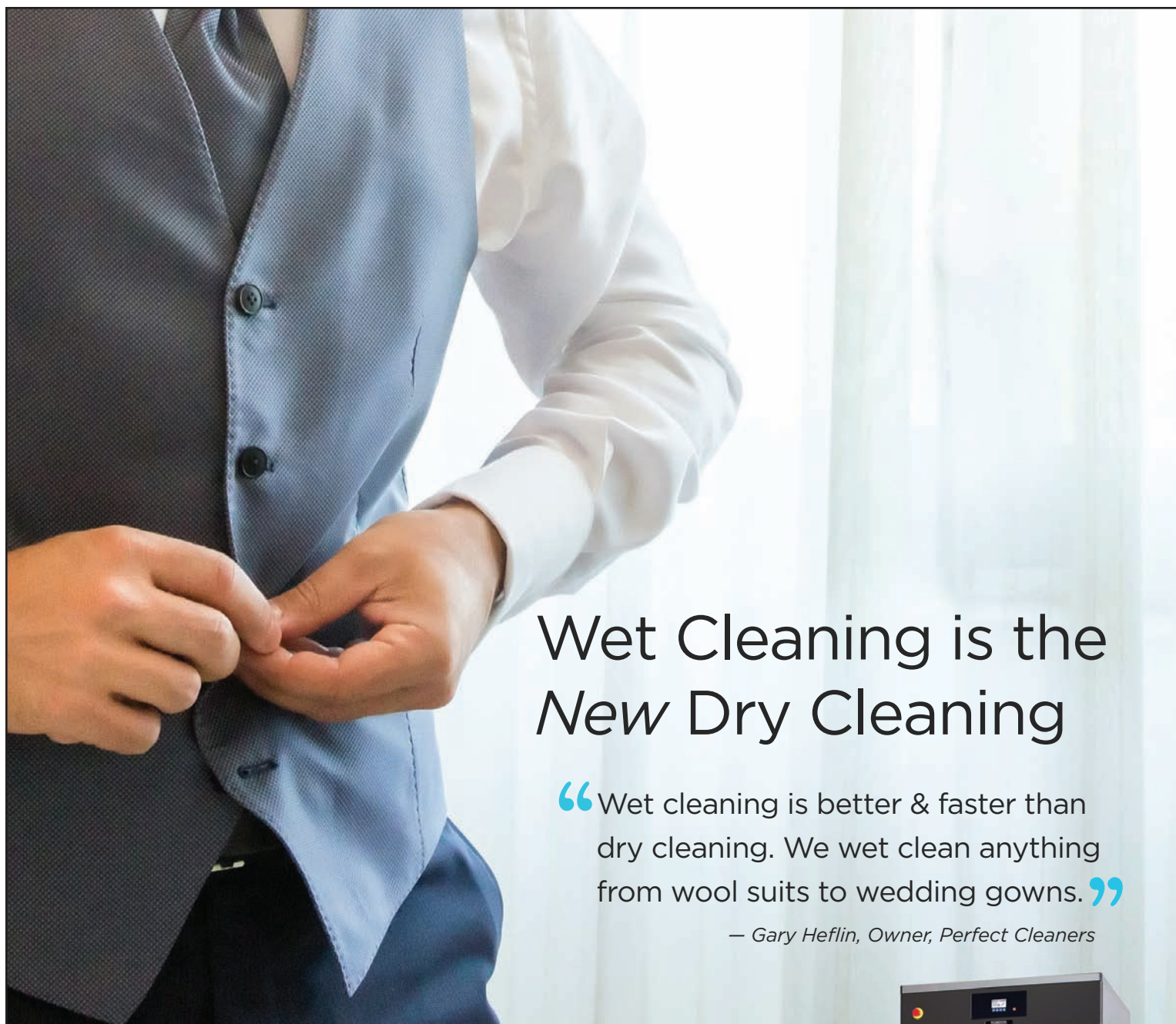
Environmentally safe volatile solvent. This is used to remove localized staining, soil and rings from dryside agents.

Powdered drycleaning solvent. This agent is very effective for spot cleaning since it can be applied to most fabrics to remove dryside stains without rings. It is also effective on rings that may have been left from spotting.

Odor. There are many commercial products that can be used to remove odor. Unscented lysol spray is a store-bought product that can remove odor from the fabric. It should be sprayed on to a fabric at a safe distance so the fabric does not become wet or damp from the spray.

Acetic acid. If the garment can be tumbled in a warm dryer, spraying the garments a few times with acetic acid will remove smoke, perspiration and other odors. When spraying with acetic acid make sure the garment does not become saturated since this can cause an acetic acid odor.

Dan Eisen, former chief garment analyst for the National Cleaners Association, can be reached at (772) 340-0909 or (772) 579-5044, by e-mail at cleandan@comcast.net or through his website at www.garmentanalysis.com.



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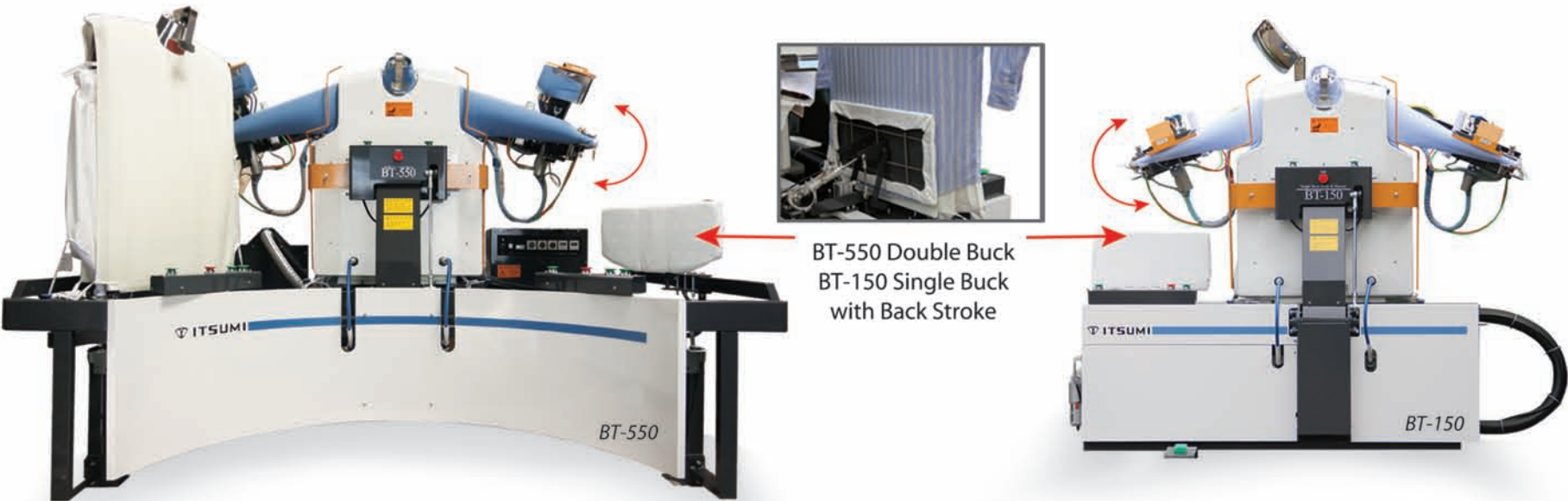
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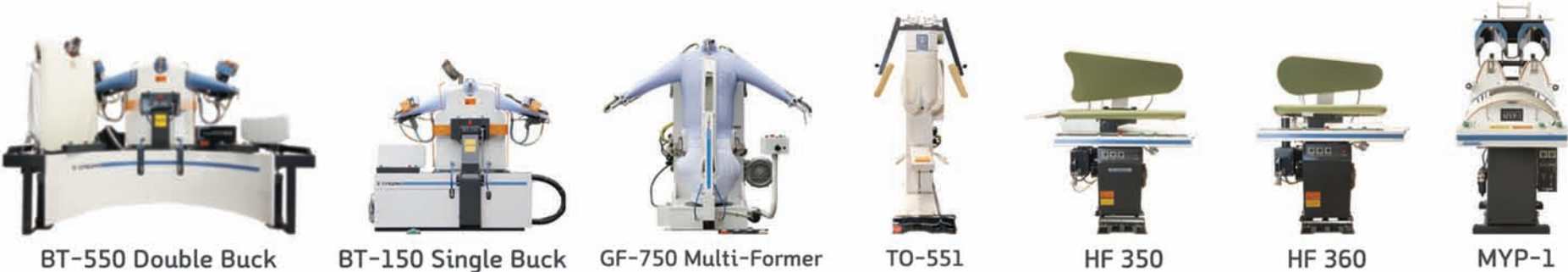
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NewsMAKERS

Girbau North America recently recognized Poseidon Textile Care Systems LLC in Troy, MI, with its 2019 Business Partner of the Year award.

Led by Michael “Stucky” Szczotka and Jeff Quail, Poseidon was recognized for outstanding sales and support of Poseidon

Textile Care Systems-branded products, including high-performance wetcleaning machines, new technology dryers and flat-work ironers.

“Several years ago, we found an expert and icon in the textile care industry and drew him into laundry,” said GNA Vice Presi-

dent of Sales Joel Jorgensen of Szczotka. “As the owner of Eagle Star Equipment, Stucky has been a top-performing distributor for 25 years. So when Girbau was developing a new, innovative wet cleaning system, we turned to him again for expert leadership and guidance in a process and results based segment of textile care. Then, two years prior to the launch of the Poseidon brand, Jeff Quail dug into his immense expertise and formulated processing solutions and value propositions for the Poseidon system to their ‘show-me’ textile care customers and market.”

Soon after, Szczotka and Quail formed Poseidon LLC, took the lead with the new brand, and began placing it with drycleaners, textile care and restoration enterprises across the country. “We are grateful for the history we share with Stucky and Jeff, for their expertise, and for their commitment to building a business case and satisfied customers for the Posei-

don brand,” said Jorgensen. To learn more, visit www.poseidonwetcleaning.com or call (800) 482-3400.



Gulf States Laundry Machinery received Union Drycleaning’s Dealer of the Year award. Pictured from left are Sunil Parmar, Harish Parmar, Matt A. Lipman of Union and Pravin Parmar.

For nearly two decades, Zengeler Cleaners has participated in the Glass Slipper Project in which prom gowns have been collected and distributed to area high school students.

With proms among the many school activities canceled in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, there will be no distribution of gowns, but Zengeler is continuing to collect the gowns along with shoes, jewelry and other accessories. All items will be safely and securely stored for the next prom season.

“With so many proms already cancelled this year, there will be far fewer items available for donation next spring,” said Tom Zengeler, president of the family-owned company. “That’s why it is so important for us to continue our collection drive and store donations — so we can meet the needs of next year’s students.

“With that in mind, we have already coordinated with the many schools who help collect donations, along with both the Glass Slipper Project and Mothers Trust Foundation. By working together now, we can assure there will be plenty of donated items available for next prom season.”

All eight Zengeler Cleaners stores in the suburban Chicago area will accept prom dress and accessories donations. They will be inspected, repaired as needed, then cleaned and professionally stored.

“Zengeler Cleaners appreciates the ongoing generosity of high school students and their families who continue to donate to this worthy cause,” continued Zengeler. “As we look forward to returning to more conventional times, our hope is that high schools can resume all of their regular traditions next year.”

Lapels Dry Cleaning, headquartered in Hanover, MA, was recently named to *Entrepreneur* magazine’s Franchise 500 for 2020. That ranking includes being tabbed number 394 out of nearly 4,000 franchise concepts now available within the country.

“We strive to be the best franchise out there every single year. The fact that we continue to rank in *Entrepreneur*’s Top 500 tells me that we are making progress toward that objective,” said Kevin Dubois,

CEO of Lapels. “We have the additional objectives of doing business in a greener fashion and helping our franchisees be successful. This recognition offers some very strong evidence we are hitting those marks as well.”

With nearly 100 locations nationwide, Lapels Dry Cleaning recently opened its first in New York state, Lapels Dry Cleaning of Latham. The owner of that drycleaning plant is Niral Patel.



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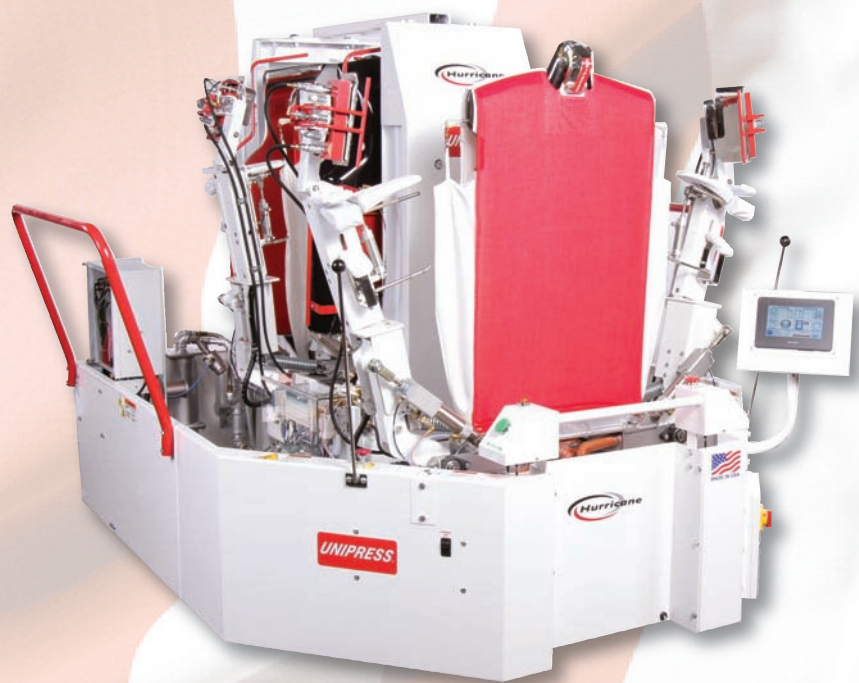
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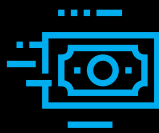
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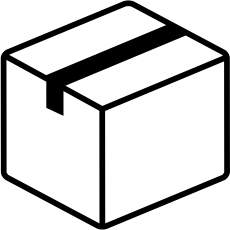
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