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Forecasting fabricare's future

While most people are eager to finally see 2020 end — *Time* magazine called it the “worst year ever” on a recent cover — there is still considerable consternation among cleaners as to what will unfold for the industry in the new year.

In recent months, financial experts around the globe have pondered what to expect from the economy in 2021, and the outlook seems mostly positive.

During the recent Fall Fest EXPO, economist Chris Kuehl cautioned that 2021 will likely not be “the year of rainbows and unicorns,” but there is some reason to believe better times lay ahead. “There’s about 75% support for pretty solid growth in 2021, so among the markets and among the economists, there is confidence going forward.”

Many in the drycleaning industry have echoed these sentiments during recent online conferences and webinars, offering much-needed hope for business owners that financial numbers will be better improving.

During the fourth installment



During the latest installment of America Best Cleaners’ “Leadership Forum” series online, (top row left to right) moderator Chris White, The Route Pros’ James Peuster, DLI Executive Director Mary Scalco, (bottom row left to right) Unipress’s Tom Stites, Catherine McCann of Best Cleaners and Tony Stephens, president of Tower Cleaners, all discussed a topic that has been on the minds of many recently: What will happen to the drycleaning industry in 2021?

of America Best Cleaners’ (ABC) “Leadership Forum” series last month, Unipress’s Tom Stites discussed how the major manufacturer of drycleaning equipment is preparing for what lies ahead.

“For the first time in our careers — and I’m sure it’s the same for everybody else — we’re actually in uncharted waters. No one’s ever been through this before,” he said. “We’re ba-

sically taking our yearly budget and reviewing that every day.”

Nothing is certain in recent times, but that applies to the good as well as the bad. Stites noted that he had been personally affected by the coronavirus. “We did have one covid case that happened to be my 94-year-old mother-in-law,” he said. “But, she’s fine. She’s doing quite well now.”

Catherine McCann, who

works double duty as owner of Best Cleaners and a partner of ABC, noted during the same online session that her company’s plans were thrown out completely last March. As she summed it up: “What comes in every week is what our plan is.”

Her New York cleaning business dropped 89% during the first week New York went on lockdown. The staff size plummeted from 80 employees to

ten. Since then, McCann has managed to grow the staff back up to 30 employees, and the way that was accomplished was by making a plan and correcting the course on the fly to adapt to each new day’s reality. Her company has come out stronger, but the battle isn’t quite over yet.

“In my mind, in the industry, there’s going to be less owners,” she said, referring to the future. “I think there’s going to be better quality, which will drive bigger margins. I think the efficiencies that we’re all driving at — forced by a pandemic — like going cashless, going more delivery, more app pickups so people aren’t interfacing with each other... will make us bigger margins.”

Representing the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute, Executive Director Mary Scalco has appeared at numerous online events, and her assessment is that COVID-19 has sped everything up in the business world. It made customers crave convenience more than ever and it

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DLI revs up its online offerings

With coronavirus cases in the U.S. back on the steep rise, it may be a while before the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute can open its school back up for in-person instruction. However, that doesn’t mean school won’t be in session frequently in the coming months.

“Our school may be closed for now but DLI is committed to sharing information drycleaning

professionals need to survive this crisis,” noted Brian Johnson, DLI’s director of education. “So far we’ve produced more than 50 webinars and we’re not slowing down anytime soon. Drycleaners need this information. We’re here to help them survive this and come out stronger on the other side.”

In addition to hosting Zoom meetings twice a week for mem-

bers (on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. EST and Wednesdays at 3 p.m. EST), DLI will offer two webinars weekly all month.

That means eight DLI webinars are coming up, beginning with “Using LinkedIn to Generate Business” with Lou D’Aurizio on Tuesday, Jan. 5. Beth Z, Your Nerdy Best Friend, will present “29 Tech Tools to Create Social Media Content” on the

following day.

During the second week of this month, there will first be a presentation on wetcleaning with Dan Goldman of Laundrylux on Tuesday, Jan. 12, and then one on “Little Known Covid Tax Benefits” with PuzzleHR on Jan. 13.

On Tuesday, Jan. 19, Dale Kaplan of Kaplan’s Careful

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Brian Johnson



The Association of Wedding Gown Specialists met early in 2020 in Santa Barbara, CA, and toured Ablitt’s Fine Cleaners. Unfortunately, the group’s next annual meeting, originally scheduled to take place next month, has been postponed — the first such postponement from the association in 30 years. The next annual meeting will now take place in Jacksonville, FL, in 2022.



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Covid as a complication

The good news is that vaccines are coming; the bad news is that employees might refuse to get them.



LIVE TRAINING JANUARY 2021

- **Tuesday, January 5**
Using LinkedIn to Generate Business with Lou D'Autorio
- **Wednesday, January 6**
29 Tech Tools to Create Social Media Content with Beth Z
- **Tuesday, January 12**
Wetcleaning with Laundrylux's Dan Goldman
- **Wednesday, January 13**
Little Known COVID Tax Benefits with PuzzleHR
- **Tuesday, January 19**
Tailoring with Dale Kaplan of Kaplan's Careful Cleaners
- **Wednesday, January 20**
Create Your Marketing Plan for 2021 with Dave Coyle
- **Tuesday, January 26**
Using Bleaches with the A.L. Wilson Chemical Company
- **Wednesday, January 27**
Top 10 Things to Do Now to Prosper with Diana Vollmer

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Working together toward a tough but brighter future

Admittedly, taking the 2020 calendar down brought a palpable sense of satisfaction, but the truth is we'll still be feeling the effects from this year for some time to come. In a word, 2020 was brutal.

It began with the country of Australia burning and the tragic helicopter crash that killed NBA legend Kobe Bryant, his daughter, Gianna, and seven others. The year also nearly began with World War III when Iranian missiles shot down Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, killing all 176 passengers.

Also early in the year, the House of Representatives instigated impeachment proceedings against President Trump even as Prince Harry and Meghan Markle quit the royal family and Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was convicted on rape charges. At the time, the coming novel coronavirus pandemic barely captured headlines with so many competing stories.

That changed dramatically in March, a month that saw COVID-19 cases quickly spread across the globe, erupting in an unparalleled level of upheaval in our daily lives. One microscopic virus wreaked untold havoc on the world, leveling whole economies and infecting over 73.5 million people in the world (as of Dec. 16, 2020). More stunningly, it has killed over 1.6 million people... and counting.

Then, on top of everything else, the same pernicious virus killed many more jobs and businesses, isolated us from each other and even contributed to a greater divided electorate, some of whom risked their own lives in order to protest racial disparity or personal liberty. There is little doubt that 2020 was the "Year of Doom and Gloom," and even though it is finally over, we are still living in a world of question marks and foggy forecasts.

However, as we learned long ago from German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (and more recently from Kelly Clarkson), what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. For those who did make it through 2020, we have had to face our fears head on. True, Americans were quarantined, locked down and socially distant, but there is no place to hide from the effects of a pandemic of this magnitude. Most of us have consistently felt exhausted, anxious, confused and frustrated for the better part of a year, yet somehow we found the strength (and perhaps the good fortune) to keep trying to move forward, or at the very least, not falter too far backwards.

Unfortunately, that won't all stop simply because we have taken down the 2020 calendars from our walls. Covid numbers keep raging higher and there will be more challenges to accompany our journeys through these next few months. But, this time

around there is a crucial difference: We are not the same people we were last year.

For that matter, the drycleaning industry is not the same as it was before. Covid created untold challenges for it to overcome, but in doing so, it also worked as a catalyst for change, as Peter Blake notes in his column this month on page 18.

In truth, Covid changed the drycleaning industry so much that it should probably now just be the *cleaning* industry because plant owners are leaving no garment or home furnishing unturned in their efforts to try and bring in more volume. Many cleaners who have always considered adding routes to their business had no choice but to stop procrastinating and start picking up and delivering.

Still, the change in the industry has not just been relegated to increasing diversification and convenience, the pandemic also forced business operators in all industries to scrutinize their numbers more closely, resulting in wise cost-cutting measures and improved efficiency. More plant operators began to finally tap into the power of social media marketing and opening additional lines of communication with customers and staff.

The transformation has been greatly expedited by circumstances, but it was made possible only because the industry has been willing to help each other. Allied trade companies and industry associations and other groups have stepped up, embraced technology and come up with creative solutions to keep the valuable flow of information open. That was the key. Those who found solutions to problems chose not to keep those secrets to themselves. Industry members have shared ideas and leaned on one another in a strong show of unity. Personally, we've heard many stories about cleaners helping their competition as if they are in the same fight together.

So, as Covid continues to march on and problems inevitably pile up, it's just business as usual now. Things will get better. We know this, but must continue to practice patience. Vaccinations have begun to roll out, and while it's hard to guess when the virus will be under control, it's a little easier moving forward knowing that help is on the way. If that doesn't comfort you, then think about this: in this industry, you are certainly not alone and you managed to keep your business running through the hardest year most people have ever faced.

Most of us felt far too much sadness and anxiety last year, but many of us have emerged a little stronger, wiser and appreciative of the things in life we love the most. Let's try to stay that way. Good luck. Stay safe. Keep improving.

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Be sure to check out our new website, www.nationalclothesline.com, for additional coverage and news from the drycleaning industry.

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The open road

Mark Watkins, owner of Mark's Quality Cleaners in Birmingham, AL, is not the type to stand still for too long. "It's harder to hit a moving target," he quipped.

In his down time, he enjoys racking up miles on the open road on his BMW street motorcycle that weighs in the ballpark of 800 to 900 pounds. Add a passenger on back and some luggage — every year he embarks on a long bike adventure — and you can see why his approach is often steeped in caution. "I ride like I have a target painted on my back and my front," he said.

Not that long ago, he felt that way about his drycleaning business, which he started almost 40 years ago. Mark found himself at a crossroads with the business and he had a lot of people questioning a big decision.

"We needed to move for space reasons, and because we were renting, and because our drive-up business had gone to almost nothing," he recalled. "They took our [traffic] light away so people couldn't turn left coming to us or getting out. It became untenable."

While the move made sense on paper, many of Mark's longtime drycleaning associates tried to talk him out of it. To be fair, Mark was 71 at the time and they were perplexed why he would be so willing to complicate his life so much at that juncture.

"My thought was, there's only one reason [to do it]: because it's the next step," he explained, noting the move would also benefit his son who has worked with him at the family business for many years. "Josh can continue to grow after I do the backstroke out of here, and he'll have something that is worthwhile and will be good for him the rest of his life."

Traveling further back down the road of Mark's life, there was a time where he wanted nothing to do with drycleaning. His father, an enterprising milkman for many years, started Watkins Cleaners in 1956 and was ahead of his time in many ways, including offering curbside service for customer convenience.

"Nobody else did that back then," Mark noted. "I would sit out there in a chair and play with matches and drink my cokes. When the customers drove up, I'd wait on them."

As for the business itself, Mark was not a fan: "I just didn't like it and daddy and I butted heads forever."

After high school, he earned a B.S. in business from Jacksonville State University, then spent the better part of a decade with the Clow Corporation selling ductile iron and plastic pipe. That suited him well until he was ready to settle down and start a family.

In 1981, Mark bought a drycleaning business that was on its third owner at the time. "It had junk for equipment. It was horrible," he laughed. "It was called Ma and Pa Cleaners. Does that tell you anything?"

He suddenly had a brand new business, lots of debt and a brand new baby at home. "And I was working on old junk equipment until 3 o'clock in the morning with a guy who didn't know how to work on them... who smoked

Chesterfields... constantly," Mark said.

In the early days, his energy and good sales skills helped keep the business on the road to success. Although, there were some anxiety-filled days.

"I'll never forget leaning over my paychecks in the heat of summer, trying to write paychecks out and hopefully they would clear when I

about what their clothes look like."

Being picky worked for Mark's Quality Cleaners well enough to force its owner into scouting a new location for a new building to go up over a year-and-a-half ago.

"We moved in April 1 of 2019," Mark said. "We moved out of the other place in three days."

somebody bagging all day — that's crazy. It saves you a person, period. And, they always show up."

Even after four decades, Mark has discovered that there are always new things to try, new lessons to learn and new challenges to overcome. The pandemic is just the latest.

"Realize that this is going to end

marksqualitycleaners.com



Mark Watkins

handed them out," he added. "My sweat landed on the ink, making it smear. That's a memory that I'll never get over."

Mark had managed to learn a few smart business strategies from his father and he employed them at this business early on.

"We tripled the volume of the business in the first three years," Mark said. "We grew it because we had curb service. We did extra things. We charged more for our work. We did what I thought was better work. Of course, every cleaner thinks he does the best."

The growth precipitated a move to a bigger and better location, which served the company well when it began to offer pickup and delivery routes.

Friend and fellow cleaner Claude Foreman, owner of One Cleaners in Metairie, LA, had tried to talk Mark into adding the service for a couple of years, but he wouldn't bite.

"I finally got into the route business and wished I had done it two or three years sooner," he admitted. "We had been needing to grow again."

The timing worked out well, though, because Josh had graduated with a BS in business marketing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2005.

"When Josh came to work for me, I was just beginning my foray into the route business," Mark noted. "I said, 'You run the routes. I'll turn that over to you and we'll grow this thing together.'"

Getting new business matters little, however, if you do not produce enough quality to draw them back. Fortunately the "quality" in the business's name was not just hype.

"In this industry, the number of things that we do and the number of things that we have to watch out for — if you're not nitpicky and persnickety about what you do, you won't survive," Mark emphasized. "Your customers are absolutely persnickety

The new building is much cooler than the previous one, especially in the literal sense. "We've got lots of space. We've got glass all around and high ceilings. In the wintertime, at the other store, we used to have to run our air conditioner," Mark laughed. "Now, this building with its 28' peak ceilings... if I ran the air conditioner right now they'd be wearing their coats in the back."

Before the business had even been in the new location for a year, the coronavirus wreaked havoc on sales. Still, Mark doesn't seem to regret postponing his retirement, though many might not blame him.

"I told my son when this whole thing started... I said, 'You know son, this is kind of exciting for me because there is a lot of uncertainty here and I'm scared, as you should be, because we don't know what's going to happen. But, what it'll do is it'll teach you what you have to do,'" Mark recalled.

Like most cleaners, he has trimmed costs this year while trying to bring in more household goods and laundry. Even so, the business currently stands at about 30% down from usual.

"I'm not going to continue to see doom and gloom," Mark said. "I really think that when people start going back to work, when they start populating the offices again, our business will ramp back up to — maybe not what it was, but close. Then, it's up to us as operators to go out and get more, whatever your formula is for doing that."

One lesson most drycleaners learned (or relearned) during the past year is to become more efficient. Mark has long been a practitioner of embracing technology that makes sense in that regard.

"We've got to change our methodology for doing things, just to streamline our process. Labor is money," he explained. "If somebody doesn't have a bagger in their plant and they've got

eventually and keep looking up and trusting that it will," he said. "The other thing is you're going to have to cut every expense that you can whittle down and cut. You have to cut it."

Today, Mark is 73 and it's hard for him not to take stock in the fortunate aspects of his life.

"As far as my family goes, I've been blessed out of my socks," he said. "I think Andy Griffin said it... 'Who would have ever thunk it?'"

Showing little signs of aging, he recently embarked on the trip of a lifetime. "My wife and I ride motorcycles with three other couples," he explained. "We shipped our bikes to Seattle and rode them across the Cascades Highway in north Washington State. Then, we went up into Canada and came back around to Victoria. We probably put our bikes on eight different ferries. We had a blast. It's absolutely gorgeous out there."

That was a memorable riding trip, but far from the only one. "We usually do Colorado or Wyoming or Utah. South Dakota," he continued. "We went to North Carolina this year to keep it close."

No matter the final destination, the trip always contains beautiful scenery, some beer and cigars and a few tall tales shared among friends.

"People think I'm crazy doing this, but I don't care what people think, obviously," he laughed.

Not caring what others thought has put him precisely in the position he is today which isn't such a bad thing.

"I am sitting here in my new office in my new building looking out at the mountainside and the trees and the sunshine," he said contentedly.

"I've been doing this a long time," he noted. "The road I took as far as being a board member of SEFA and DLI and all that — I wouldn't change it for anything. I've made lots of friends that most people don't make."



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THE SPOTTING BOARD



BY DAN EISEN

Using acids and alkali for problems

Many garments received by my analysis service (International Independent Garment Analysis Service by Daniel Eisen) require use of acids and alkalis for their correction. Some examples of problem solving may be:

- (1) Restoring color to acetate
- (2) Correcting shrunken leather
- (3) Restoring color change
- (4) Removing shine
- (5) Removing ground-in soils
- (6) Prevention of bleeding during wetcleaning
- (7) Expanded stain removal
- (8) Aid to bleaching
- (9) Stretching wool

Most spotters use acids and alkalis in limited use. They may use tannin and protein formulas and rust remover but they limit their potential for problem solving. Acids and alkalis are different in their chemical makeup and they must be used on specific staining. Spotters must be aware of their potential to damage fabrics and color on fabrics. Acids and alkalis neutralize each other. This means if an alkali is put on the fabric followed by an acid, the result of the chemical reaction would be water and salt. This is also true if an acid is put on the fabric followed by an alkali. Acids and alkalis are water soluble and not

removed by drycleaning solvents.

Acids

Acid is defined as a chemical that releases hydrogen ions in the presence of water. We measure acids using the pH scale. Seven is neutral and less than seven measures the strength of the acid. The lower number on the pH scale indicates a stronger acid. Acids are safer on bright colors than alkalis and it is for that reason we use acids to stabilize dyes in wetcleaning. Strong acids can affect dyes and the strength of many fabrics. Prepared tannin formulas are made up of a mild acid and lubricant. This is effective for removal of many tannin stains or vegetable-based staining such as coffee, tea, soda, beer, wine, etc. The degree of stain removal can be expanded when the spotter uses other acids for stain removal.

Acetic Acid

Acetic acid should be added to the spotters arsenal for stain removal. Acetic acid is similar to vinegar. Vinegar is produced by the action of bacteria on yeast-fermented brews. Vinegar can be made out of just about any plant that can be fermented to generate

alcohol which is subsequently generated into acetic acid. The hero of the fermentation process is acetobacter, a small microorganism that has the chemical power to transform alcohol into acetic acid. Acetic acid gives vinegar its pungent odor. Acetic acid has properties and advantages not possessed by other acids.

Acetic acid should be purchased at 28%. Concentrations over 28% will discolor dyes on fabrics and even dissolve acetate fabrics. It can be purchased in concentrations of 56 or 99% but is not recommended since mixing and diluting with water may not be accurate. Use 28% and even dilute it with more water so it can be used in the 20% range.

Uses of Acetic Acid

- (1) Use acetic acid after using a tannin formula. Acetic acid will have a greater effect on many tannin stains especially wine.
- (2) Delustering of acetate. Acetate fabric damage by heat and moisture can often be corrected by spraying with acetic acid, hanging to dry and then cleaning.
- (3) Shine. Shine on gabardine can often be corrected by spraying with acetic acid.

(4) Neutralize alkali. All alkalis should be neutralized after use to prevent yellowing.

(5) Shrunken leather. Caused by heat, can often be corrected by spraying with acetic acid which will make it soft and pliable so it can be shaped. Additional leather sprays must be used afterwards.

(6) Add acetic acid to wet-cleaning detergents for setting dyes on color sensitive fabrics during wetcleaning procedures.

(7) Use acetic acid to neutralize the following bleaches — peroxide and ammonia, sodium perborate and sodium percarbonate. Acetic acid is used to accelerate chlorine bleaches and all reducing bleaches.

(8) Stretching wools. Acetic acid can be added to a cationic detergent in soaking a shrunken wool that has to be made soft enough to stretch.

(9) Acetic acid can be used in combination with hydrogen peroxide (peracetic) for bleaching some fabrics.

Oxalic Acid

Oxalic acid comes in crystal or liquid state. Laidlaw makes a product called Rustgo which is oxalic acid in a liquid form. In crystal form the oxalic acid should be mixed 15 parts water to one part oxalic acid. Oxalic acid can be used after acetic acid for tannin stain removal. It will remove rust staining without the damage potential of rust remover. Oxalic acid is applied to a stain and heated with the steam gun. It must be flushed after use. Remember, heat accelerates all chemicals and oxalic acid should be tested for safety prior to its use on fabrics.

Rust Remover

Hydrofluoric acid is the makeup of rust remover. This is a very effective acid but requires skill and knowledge for its use. Rust remover can be very corrosive if left on a fabric and contact on a customers skin can cause severe burns. After using rust remover it must be flushed thoroughly with water and a protein formula or a mild alkali must be added to the area to neutralize any residue the acid left. Rust remover must be tested before use and can discolor cashmere, gabardine, glass trimming and

Tannin Process

- (1) Flush.
- (2) Neutral Lubricant.
- (3) Mechanical Action.
- (4) Flush.
- (5) Tannin formula.
- (6) Mechanical Action.
- (7) Acetic acid plus neutral lubricant.

(8) Mechanical Action.

(9) Flush.

(10) Oxalic acid (Test).

(11) Heat.

(12) Flush.

(13) Rust Remover (Test).

(14) Flush.

(15) Peroxide plus ammonia (Test).

(16) Flush.

(17) Acetic Acid.

(18) Flush.

Alkali

Alkali releases hydroxyl ions in the presence of water. Alkali on the pH scale is above seven. The higher the number the stronger the alkali. Alkali is found in protein formulas and ammonia. Alkali is effective on protein stains or stains originating from the body. This includes eggs, milk, urine, etc. The wool and silk are sensitive to alkali.

Protein Formulas

Most commercial protein formulas are made up of a mild alkali and lubricant.

Ammonia (26)

Ammonia is a very volatile alkali and is stronger than the alkali found in most protein formulas. Ammonia is effective for neutralizing the effects of discolorations caused by acids. This usually occurs on cottons, rayons and linens. Sometimes titanium sulphate will produce a discoloration that can be neutralized by using ammonia. For removing ground-in soil nothing works better than using ammonia mixed with a wet-side lubricant. Ammonia is very volatile and should be kept in a cool place since it can expand rapidly. Ammonia is used to increase the bleaching action of peroxide, perborate and percarbonate. Do not use ammonia on chlorine bleach since it will break down and will release chlorine gas.

Protein Spotting Procedure

- (1) Flush.
- (2) Protein formula.
- (3) Mechanical action.
- (4) Flush.
- (5) Ammonia plus neutral lubricant.
- (6) Mechanical action.
- (7) Flush.
- (8) Peroxide Plus Ammonia (Test).
- (9) Heat.
- (10) Flush.
- (11) Acetic Acid.
- (12) Flush.
- (13) Digest.

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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Forecasting fabricare’s future

Continued from page 1

forced operators to adapt and evolve in order to survive.

“We’ve learned to clean whatever you can wear,” she said.

As a trade association, DLI had to undergo a similar transformation in order to be able to continue to serve its members during a crisis.

“This is when you shine. This is when you step up to the plate because sometimes your members just want to hear they’re not alone through all of this,” she explained.

Perhaps nobody was alone, but nobody was shielded, either.

As event after event have been cancelled or postponed this year — including Messe Frankfurt pushing the Clean Show back until July 30 of 2022 — the ripple has been felt by the entire industry. The absence of such events created a stronger need for the industry to connect during a time complicated by quarantines and social distancing.

Fortunately, during 2020 trade associations, industry groups and allied trades have worked hard to create a significant virtual presence to assist cleaners in a crisis as best they can. It might not be the same as meeting in person, but it has

helped bridge the gap.

“Technology is a great thing,” Scalco said. “If this pandemic had happened even five years ago, we would not be able to touch and feel our members the way we can now with technology.”

Expect more training and idea exchanging on Zoom and Facebook for many months to come, but there are many indications that better economic times await. By press time, vaccinations have already begun to roll out in all 50 states, and a bipartisan group of lawmakers were working on a \$900 billion stimulus compromise close to completion.

Regardless of what happens, most drycleaners seem determined to continue improving their businesses by embracing new strategies, some more unusual than others. Up north in Calgary, Tony Stephens, president of Tower Cleaners, described his “roller coaster” year during the Leadership Forum series. Business dropped 82% at the start of the pandemic, forcing Stephens and his management team to come up with a unique idea.

“We’re the largest cleaners in the city and the second largest cleaners and us — amalgamated our production,” he said.

Based on a handshake agreement, the companies merged the best of their individual parts and split costs based on how much production each company utilizes. “For both of us, this is a really big win-win,” he said.

Afer a year full of unpleasant surprises, Stephens — like many cleaners — feels ready to take the next step. “We’ve rebuilt. We’ve amalgamated. We’ve acquired. We’ve closed. We’ve opened. We’ve expanded — all during Covid,” he explained.

“So, if you ask me what it’s going to look like in the future, I think it’s going to look really positive and I’m excited.”

DLI revs up its online offerings

Continued from page 1

Cleaners will discuss “Tailoring,” followed by David Coyle’s “Create Your Marketing Plan for 2021” the next day.

Finally, the webinar schedule for the month will culminate with “Using Bleaches” from the A.L. Wilson Chemical Co. on Tuesday, Jan. 26. Diana Vollmer will host “Top Ten Things to Do Now to Prosper” the next day on Wednesday, Jan. 27.

Drycleaners such as LeAnn Glasser of Plantengas Cleaners

of Spring Lake, MI, have found DLI’s meetings and webinars to be a good source of valuable information during a very tough year.

“Covid has hit the drycleaning and laundry industry hard,” she noted. “DLI continues to work hard to help us succeed. Whether it’s information on how to process garments and bedding during Covid, navigate financial tools that have been provided by the government to help keep us afloat or create new marketing

strategies to obtain additional sales, they are there for us.”

Every week, DLI adds new recordings of its recent presentations in order to make them available for members who may

have missed them.

Those who wish to view past presentations can login to DLIonline.org and simply click on the one they wish to watch.

Currently their archives include dozens of presentations altogether, coming from a wide variety of speakers.

The library has been broken down into the following categories: diversification, maintenance, management, mar-

keting, production, finishing, stain removal and business sales and acquisitions.

Non-members can opt to join DLI to participate in any future programs, access the video library, as well as other benefits that are a part of association membership.

For more information on any of DLI’s upcoming visits, call (800) 638-2627 or visit them online at DLIonline.org/membership for information on joining the association.



Panel discusses plant transactions

Current coronavirus conditions have generated a lot of buying and selling activity in the drycleaning industry, so EnviroForensics and *National Clothesline* recently teamed up to present a webinar on “Why Phase I ESA Are So Important When Buying or Selling a Drycleaner.”

As David Hoffman, a partner at EnviroForensics, noted: “If

performed and utilized correctly, a Phase I [Environmental Site Assessment] can help you make very important decisions about managing your environmental liability. If not performed correctly or if the findings are not heeded, you may inadvertently step in the pathway of a big environmental problem later on.”

Typically, the cost of a Phase

I ESA ranges between \$1,500 and \$4,000, depending on various factors such as the size of the property and how long the business has been at the location.

It was emphasized during the online session that “most” Phase I ESAs lead to a Phase II because of the discovery of Recognized Environmental Conditions (REC). As Jeff Carnahan, presi-

dent of EnviroForensics also pointed out, many lenders “may require a Phase II” simply due to the fact that a cleaning business has been located on the property.

Perhaps the most important take-away from the event was that both buyers and sellers must practice due diligence if they want to protect themselves. Part of that due diligence is an option

to research historical insurance coverages on the property that might be used to defray remediation costs and act as a “safety net” for your real estate purchase.

Companies such as PolicyFind do a lot more than click a few times on the Internet, according to Kristen Brown, director of operations there. “It is much more than just digging through files. We conduct personal interviews. We also review public records and we review any and all business records to look for new leads.”

Most cleaners find it hard to believe that historical policies can still be used today. As Brown noted, “I want you to know that these old policies never expire. To explain a little bit more, the CGL [Commercial General Liability] policies we’re interested in are occurrence-based, meaning they never expire if the damage has happened in the policy period.”

During a question-and-answer session at the end of the webinar, John Scagnelli, partner at Scarinci Hollenbeck LLP, explained that finding a contamination during a Phase I ESA does not mean the sale will not take place.

“The extent of that contamination needs to be understood, needs to be determined and cost out,” he explained. “You may have to adjust the parameters of your sales transaction and take that contamination into account.”

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WRENCH WORKS



By BRUCE GROSSMAN

Stop those expensive solvent leaks

In a bygone era of cheap solvent, transfer machinery and Per Combo filters and cooker stills, a drip was generally no big deal. However, the increasing costs of solvent and energy, coupled with environmental regulations, should markedly sharpen our maintenance and housekeeping practices. I'm dedicating the next few articles to the selection of/and techniques involved, with maintaining and replacing that ubiquitous device often taken for granted, the "lowly gasket."

Stills have them, drycleaning machines have them, dryers have them, pumps have them — everywhere you look in a drycleaning plant you find them. They're everywhere. Gaskets — that's what I'm talking about!

With this in mind, beginning with the drycleaning machine we find what are probably the four most recognizable gaskets you deal with on a daily basis: the loading door, button trap door, lint trap door (on many drycleaning machines the lint and button trap are enclosed in the same housing) and still door.

These doors are opened and closed on a regular basis causing wear and failure of the gaskets designed to seal them shut. Even the most unaware operator cannot long ignore a solvent leak at the loading door. However,

you'd be surprised at how few operators take the time to go behind the machine with a good flashlight and observe the still door during heavy distillation.

In many cases, a grungy still waste container sits under the still door and the surrounding area is often caked with old still residue. Because of this, even large leaks can go undetected if the timing and lighting are not right (the price of solvent being what it is, these liquid type leaks cost you big time). Also, this will happen because the heat and chemistry sight glasses in stills have a high rate of failure and when faulty will leak lots of solvent.

Lint and button trap leaks are usually of the vapor variety and harder to locate because the escaping vapor doesn't usually leave behind a visible residue.

Now that you are aware of the problem areas, let's explore them one by one and see how you can isolate the leaking area and stop the fluid loss.

When you notice a solvent leak at a door it will almost always appear to be located at the bottom area of the door gasket.

That's because gravity being what it is, the liquid solvent leaking past the gasket rolls down the surface of the door and drips off of the bottom center.

When you see a leak like this you need to take action at the end of the load that's currently being processed or the case of a still, the next time the still is cold. Not to worry, chances are good a simple fix will get you back on track.

When the door can be safely opened, look at the surface of the gasket. Generally, there will be a slight groove in the gasket caused by the pressure against the raised rim portion on the drycleaning machine that the door seals against (see figure 1).

Often lint accumulates in this groove and prevents the proper mating of the gasket against the machine front. It is vital to routinely clean this groove, keeping it free from lint.

Also, the surface of the raised rim (see figure 2) that the gasket seats on must be kept lint-free. On newer machines the rubber of this gasket is a solid robust type and can be cleaned easily with a small wire brush (if the gasket is a type of foam use something more delicate like a spotting brush).

The photographs accompanying this article show the cleaning of the still door gasket. The same procedure holds true for all the doors on the machine.

A spotting brush is shown being used to clean the gasket. In many cases the bristles

PROPER GASKET MAINTENANCE



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

may be too soft to remove caked-on lint. Brushes with brass or stainless bristles can be used on solid rubber gaskets.

Operate the machine and see if the leak has stopped. If after cleaning the gasket the door still leaks, you have a choice to make.

Do you want to order a new gasket for replacement or spend the time and effort to attempt an adjustment to the door and/or gasket in order to effect a repair?

Hate to leave you hanging, but that's it for this issue. Next issue I'll be covering how to adjust and/or replace these door gaskets.

Bruce Grossman is the chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing, the manufacturer of the Tatler steam trap tester; Drop In The Bucket and Sahara line of high purity separator water mister/evaporators and the new EZ Level line of return tank level and temperature controllers. The EZ Level replaces the problematic ball-float valve in your boilers' return tank, helping to eliminate boiler damage and lost production caused by boiler down time. See our ad in this issue and for further information on the EZtimers product line or visit www.eztimers.com. Address any questions or comments to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.



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BY JAMES PEUSTER

THE ROUTE PRO

Buying a pickup and delivery route

One of the most common calls I'm fielding today is about buying a route out. As the saying goes, "if you can't beat 'em, buy 'em!" A competitor is already acutely aware of how your business works, and may be willing to pay a premium over another bidder if given the opportunity to reduce local competition. Other intangible data points like market share and mind share have more value to a competitor than to a new business owner.

It's interesting to see what

many feel a route is worth or even if it is worth being interested in. There are more and more bobtail routes starting and everyone is getting a van and promoting their delivery service. So, as best as I can convey in an article, here's what you must think about.

First of all, do your research. Here is your initial checklist.

1. Must look at tax record.
2. Dollars vs Data....percentage of route vs number of customers.
3. Manifest and activity.
4. 2019 dollars versus

Covid numbers.

Second of all, what is the volume base on number of trucks on the road. With that being said, here is a simple formula to look at.

1. 0-50K: 20-25 cents on the dollar.
2. 50-100K: 25-35 cents on the dollar.
3. 100-150K: 35-40 cents on the dollar.
4. 150-200K: 40-45 cents on the dollar.
5. 200-250K+: 45-55 cents on the dollar.

Keep in mind there is a lot more going on to that. If you

want to dive deeper. Then you must do the following.

Value it with EBITDA. EBITDA is essentially net income with interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization added back to it, and can be used to analyze and compare profitability between companies and industries because it eliminates the effects of financing and accounting decisions.

Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization is the most common way to value a small business. As your earn-

ings from the business are based on your personal income taxes, it is best to value the company in a way that removes personal tax inputs. This is especially true for businesses formed as a sole proprietorship. EBITDA does have some "curb appeal," though, in that it is often higher than true, after-tax net income.

Use intangibles as an advantage. Intangibles can be just as important as bottom line profits. A business that is well-known in the community with a long list of customers naturally carries more value than a newly-established business with the same earnings. Cite the amount of time in business, as well as the diversity of your customers and a realistic look at local competitors. Businesses with long track records and limited competition obviously earn values toward the higher end of the spectrum.

Separate assets as needed. Some businesses are capital intensive, from storefronts to company car fleets. Capital intensive businesses are attractive only to people who have strong financials to purchase both the assets in the business, as well as the future income stream of a business. Attracting the most bidders requires that they have something for everyone. Consider offering the business with and without major assets like real estate. Selling the business free of large capital investments like real estate makes the deal more digestible for buyers on the lower end while earning you a stream of future lease income. Alternatively, commercial real estate brokers are usually very interested in purchasing commercial property with long-term leases in place.

Finally, keep this in mind, you must have a great driver in place. You will lose customers due to the fact of the change. You also may win back more. No matter what, plan on losing 25% of the volume if you don't handle the transaction and transition correctly. Good luck in 2021. It's going to still be a bumpy ride.

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.



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AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE



BY PETER BLAKE

COVID-19 was a catalyst for change

By the time you read this we will have turned the calendar leaving 2020 a memory. We can use the immortal words of the Grinch to concisely sum up 2020: “Stinks, Stank, Stunk.” The hardships we all have endured will forever leave a mark on the world, our industry, and each one of us in a variety of different ways. Make no mistake about it, this global pandemic has been devastating. The magnitude of which I have never seen before, nor experienced, and frankly hope to God never have to endure again. It has not only been challenging professionally, but personally as well.

The pandemic has also been the catalyst to make changes in our industry. Instead of being a slow gradual process, the timeline was accelerated. Our customers had been making a slow steady crawl to a more casual appearance and dress, but Covid made it happen overnight. It was always headed in that direction, and drycleaners had been slowly dipping their toes into the water and deciding whether this was a worthwhile venture — but along comes Covid and made us jump into the deep end and figure it out. Now this segment of the market is far ahead of all projections, and it is now here to stay. We are going to have accept it, adapt to it, and figure out how we can make it profitable.

The same can be said for

pick-up and delivery. Amazon has been conditioning our clientele to expect instant gratification and delivery of whatever they need or want for years. Along comes Covid, and now people don’t want to have to go out for anything. Contactless delivery is now the norm and is something every business owner has had to adapt to. The public health crisis will dissipate in the coming months, but the consumer’s thirst for convenience won’t. They have built it into their lifestyle and now enjoy the freedom of being catered to and the demand for these services will continue to grow.

As we start to claw and climb our way back, we need to reflect on some of the other changes in society. With less physical and social contact, social media, email, and texting have become even more popular and even more essential to keeping connected. The fabricare industry needs to embrace those changes as well. We need to develop a multitude of ways we send our messages. I am sorry to say there is no “marketing silver bullet” that will get your story out. It takes hard work, dedication, consistency, and a vary diversified approach. If the pandemic taught us anything, I hope it is the true value of lines of communication. I can’t tell you how many times I get asked: “What is the best way to contact my customers?” My answer is always the same:

“Every way you can.” Email is a great tool, but it can’t stand alone. Texting is a great service, but it will only reach a fraction of your customers.

Small businesses need to develop a comprehensive plan that includes a good website, a business Facebook page, a strong social media presence, an email marketing strategy, and a texting service. All of these tools should be used in a coordinated fashion, and in many respects should be backed up with some direct mail marketing. If you are like most cleaners, you have some of that list, but not all of it. You should be working towards a program that will encompass all of it. Don’t worry — you are not alone. If you need help there are plenty of low cost, high value programs out there to assist you. I can help. Reach out — DLI can help. Reach out!

Let me give you one key piece of advice: Don’t Wait. If you only have a couple of these tools in place, start using them. Build up your presence. Don’t have everyone’s email address? Don’t wait. Start a program and build to it. The longer you wait, the farther you fall behind, and the more excuses you will find to delay. Make a plan to use what you have and then add and build upon it.

Not only have the lines of communication changed, so have the messages. Time is one of the most important commodities we have. We need to

demonstrate the time savings of our industry. We need to promote the benefits of lessening the workload and increasing family time. Trust me, I recently endured a couple days of working while Zoom-schooling my 5-year old grandson, and then taking care of dinner. There is no time or energy left to do laundry or anything else. People that work from home are far more likely to be stressed for time and in need of services like ours!

People are recognizing the value of local businesses. They realize that these main street businesses are important to the landscape of the community and help build a strong foundation. People see the need to keep businesses in town open and thriving. Your messaging can capitalize on that by promoting yourself, but also use cross promotion with other businesses that are dealing with the same stresses. You can find some great local marketing partnerships with companies that provide landscaping services, lawn care, car washes, and house cleaning services. Take advantage of alliances you can build within a community.

Don’t fall into the trap of always looking for a “drycleaning customer.” Be on the lookout for people that live a certain lifestyle. People that value their time and recognize service. People who care for their personal items like their

yard, their vehicles, their homes — these are where you may find your biggest potential growth.

Looking ahead

As we turn the page to a new year we are looking with hope to a much brighter future. Vaccines are already making their way into the hands of first responders and frontline workers. The general public does not seem too far behind. We are hopeful that all the Covid concerns over large gatherings and renewed vigilance for safety have helped turn the tide of new infection rates and restrictions across the country. We are starting the year off with positive news and a renewed optimism for a stronger industry and a thriving business.

Like many of you, I have had to make drastic changes in my life. For those who have gotten to know me over the years — I am not built well for “social distancing”. I enjoy people. I like meeting with people, sharing insights and experiences, learning from them, and helping people in their efforts to make their businesses more successful. I will be happy to never hear those two words again in that context, and it is my profound hope this isn’t one of the changes that remain. We can’t lose the humanity that is so important, and my fear is that this distancing has caused far too many people to withdraw from society. The more we accept it, the more normal it all seems.

I for one, can’t wait to get back out to meeting people, have live conferences and board meetings, and join society once again. Help us all to reconnect. Reach out and share your stories with me. The good, the bad... your hopes for 2021 and beyond. Share your fears of what lies ahead.

Be safe, be strong, be resilient — and be prepared, because now the rebuilding begins. Email me at peteblke@aol.com and share your story.

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. He can be reached by email at peteblke@aol.com or by phone at (617) 791-0128.

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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

Expect COVID-19 to complicate 2021

It appears that COVID-19 will still be a major story in 2021. While vaccines started to appear before the end of 2020, it will be June or later before the general population starts to get inoculated. Will you be requiring your employees to get vaccinated? What if they refuse? Do you plan to get one?

While this could change, it is unlikely that federal, state, or local government will mandate vaccinations beyond public schools, health care facilities, nursing homes, and perhaps their own employees. Private employers will get to decide whether they want to mandate employee vaccinations. Most will encourage employees to get a shot (or two), but fall short of requiring them. If a company decides to mandate the shots, it must be prepared for one or more employee refusals. A report recently said that over half of first responders in NYC were

not planning to get the vaccine when available. Whether an employee refusal is grounds for discharge will depend on a number of factors. If a business can show that the vaccination is a necessary job requirement (probably easy to do given

charge may be justified.

Employers can adopt and enforce other Covid precautions (masks, hand washing, social distancing, reporting of symptoms, etc.) with less concern. In fact, in some states, such precautions may already

the employees who have tested positive. If employees “guess” who tested positive, that’s OK. It is just that laws like the ADA and Genetic Information Nondisclosure Act make health information confidential.

by legislation.

Staying on top of Covid requirements can be difficult, but there are resources. A good place to start is the Center for Disease Control. The Department of Labor has information on Covid leave, and OSHA offers workplace guidance, <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/standards.html>.

But be wary of an oversupply of information. The Hock Principle states: Simple, clear purpose and principles give rise to complex and intelligent behavior.

Complex rules and regulations give rise to simple and stupid behavior.

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Will you be requiring your employees to get vaccinated? What if they refuse?

death rates and quarantine requirements), then the reason for the refusal becomes paramount. If the refusal is religious-based or based on real medical concerns (like an allergy), there may be an obligation to accommodate. If the refusal is out of fear of the vaccine, discipline is more supportable. An accommodation could be removing the employee from other employee or customer contact, but if you can demonstrate that accommodation is unreasonable, dis-

be required by order or legislation. It is likely that President Biden will use the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to make workplace requirements nationwide. Currently, the obligations of employees are different from state to state because police powers are more a local concern than a federal one.

Generally, employers should report cases of employee Covid to other employees with whom they have had contact, not actually naming

Testing for all employees and quarantines may be required, if not good practice. Unfortunately, the latency period between exposure and a positive test result could be nearly a week. Whether customers must be notified is less clear and may depend on state negligence law.

If employees were practicing good Covid hygiene in the workplace, there is probably no need to tell customers, but some states are considering addressing notice requirements

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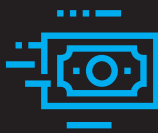
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