



Wash and where?

Outsourcing may seem an easier option, but Margaret Palmer explores how on premises laundry (OPL) could save time and money in the long term

An efficient laundry service is vitally important in hotels. Crisp, clean bed linen, soft towels and bathrobes will create the right impression on customers. But what provides the best solution – in-house, outsourcing or a combination? Clearly it depends on the size of the hotel – whether it’s a city centre location or a seaside resort, the costs involved of setting up an on premises

laundry and whether there is space.

Consultant Hildegard Dorn-Petersen FCSI says: “Space is the issue – does the hotel have enough to install an in-house laundry? You need plenty of space with windows for ventilation. It’s no good if it’s in the basement – laundry rooms become hot and employees may get ill.”

City centre hotels tend to be tight on space, so most outsource laundry,

according to Dorn-Petersen: “In Berlin, for example, deluxe hotels don’t want to waste any space on a laundry so they outsource. As Berlin is 140km from Poland, the hotels send their laundry there. Every night the linen goes to Poland and at 3am, it comes back to the hotels. It’s the cheapest solution for them.”

Dorn-Petersen thinks combining in-house laundry with outsourcing is a good solution. “That’s what most of my clients do,” she says. “They send out the flat linens (bedsheets, tablecloths), while washing towels and dressing gowns in-house. This



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Roberto Zucconi

works well for clients with spas – every customer will use one or two towels and take a fresh one each time, meaning that by 4pm there can be a shortage. So it makes sense to do these in-house. Towels are easy to wash and tumble dry and just need folding.”

To make an in-house laundry worthwhile, hotels need to have at least 100 rooms and sufficient space for professional washing machines. It means the hotel can be independent and have clean, fresh laundry available at short notice. They can monitor the quality of the washing and how the staff care for the laundry.

Cost effective

Dorn-Petersen cites the example of the five star Sonnenalp hotel in Bavaria, Germany, winner of the Best Hotel Spa category of European Health & Spa Awards 2015. Previously the hotel outsourced laundry to a company that suddenly closed, so they had the choice to outsource the laundry or install



an on premises laundry. “The nearest laundry is 100km away so it made sense for them to build a laundry,” says Dorn-Petersen. “They have the space and money.”

The on premises laundry (OPL) has a production area of 800 sq m with five different operational areas. Equipment was selected for the lowest possible energy, water and chemical use. As Dorn-Petersen says: “If you’re thinking of an in-house laundry, you would need to research the latest environmentally-friendly machines as there have been such dramatic changes in the last 10 years. If you already have washing machines, check your current equipment and see what you could save. It could be that a new machine will save money, water and energy.”

Cost is obviously an important consideration. Roberto Zucconi from Alliance Laundry Systems thinks having an in-house laundry is more cost-effective than sending washing out. “When we design a laundry room for customers, we provide details of costings. We estimate that customers will get a return on investment between 11 months to two years,” he says. “This takes into account labour, utilities, equipment and purchasing linen. The in-house laundry

also helps to increase the capital investment of the hotel through the purchase of capital equipment such as washing machines.”

The main advantages of an in-house laundry, according to Zucconi, is the control over the finished quality of laundry, meaning that bedlinen and towels will last longer, thus saving money. “In an in-house laundry, the



correct detergents can be used to ensure higher production and longer life of linen and uniforms. In an external company, they may use harsh chemicals, which may weaken the fabric so it won’t last as long. They may also cut corners and return the laundry after rinsing and ironing only. As well as this, you might have to rent additional stock. In a 200 room hotel with 80% average occupancy, each customer will need three towels a day (one in the room, one in the laundry and one in stock) – this is a huge number of towels.”

With outsourcing, hotels will still have to factor in time for staff to check the laundry upon return from the external company. “Generally the staff member checking the washing brings back 20 trolleys covered with plastic and only checks one of them, so there’s no guarantee that all the laundry is up to standard.” says Zucconi. “Also, with external laundries, it can be difficult to get a fast turnaround time for special situations such as a conference.”

Staff training

Another issue is that linen may get mixed up with another establishment’s at an external company. “Even if the hotel manages to get the linen back, there’s always the chance it isn’t the same and could be more worn than the

hotel’s own linen,” Zucconi adds.

Staff training is an important part of running a successful in-house laundry. “Labour is the highest cost of a laundry either externally or internally,” says Zucconi. “We always include in our proposals the cost of staff training with a refresher after one month if necessary.”

Alliance Laundry Systems works with customers to design in-house laundries to suit their operation, and equipment is carefully selected. Zucconi says that although washing machines and tumble dryers have traditionally been powered by electricity, gas models are becoming more widely available. The firm has developed the Unimac UW washing machines with a cycle time of 30 to 35 minutes for light soiled items and 40 to 45 minutes for heavily soiled items. In this case time is money. ■



IN-HOUSE v OUTSOURCED LAUNDRY

In-house Laundry

- Control over the quality of the laundry
- Cuts high rental costs for linen
- Own stock takes
- Cost savings on purchasing and washing
- Damaged stock will need to be replaced at extra cost
- Trained staff are more likely to take more care of your own linen
- Emergency situations can be handled without incurring extra cost

Outsourced Laundry

- Quality of laundry may not be up to expectations
- High rental charges for linen may apply
- You don’t have to do your own stocktakes
- Reject linen is only replaced depending on the service level agreement
- Linen replacement is not always guaranteed by supplier
- Damaged stock can be charged for
- Outside staff may be less careful with linen

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