

OPL 101

Principles to consider when choosing distributor partner

BY MARK HYNES

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. — Most on-premise laundry managers understand that their facility is heavily reliant on the equipment and services provided by their distributor. It's also important to realize how the distributor's manufacturing partner is involved.

Keeping this in mind, there are a few specific areas that managers should focus on when vetting a potential partner.

STABILITY

Most people wouldn't trust a first-year law school student to provide legal counsel, so why would managers trust a distributor that hasn't been established in the community and the OPL business?

If a distributor has supported its clients through the most recent of economic downturns, and sometimes even crises dating back to the Great Depression, managers should be confident in their ability to provide equipment and services to best fit the facility's needs.

The success of a distributor can be closely tied to the commercial

laundry manufacturer they support. A manufacturer that has been an industry mainstay for many years has been effective in offering innovative equipment that positively impacts the bottom line.

INNOVATIVE AND DURABLE

A distributor should be able to deliver options for durable, commercial-grade equipment that will provide the lowest operating costs.

Manufacturers offer commercial equipment with advanced control systems to increase efficiency and help reduce operating costs associated with labor, linen replacement, utilities and maintenance. These control systems can also provide alerts when preventive maintenance and service is required.

Even with these advanced features, it's not uncommon for laundry managers to be enticed by equipment with the lowest price tag. Customers who choose the less-expensive machines, that sometimes deploy the same technology found in home equipment, often end up wasting time and money due to frequent repairs and replacement machines.

With this in mind, managers should ask the distributor about the machines' manufacturing and testing processes.

In addition to sharing basic information such as where the equipment is made, a knowledgeable distributor will be able to provide specifics on these processes.

AFTER THE SALE

It's important to remember that choosing equipment is just the start of one's relationship with a distributor. Managers should ask about the service and support they'll receive after the sale.

By taking part in in-person and online training and certification sessions provided by the manufacturer, distributors are able to offer customers factory-trained service technicians. These technicians will ensure the equipment is maintained and serviced properly throughout its life. If the service area extends across multiple cities or states, distributors should have technicians strategically placed within each territory to be able to provide fast response times.

It's important for the distributor

to use genuine parts when making repairs, those that are identical to the ones used in the machine at the time of manufacturing. Created by the same team of advanced engineers that both tested and produced the equipment, these parts, available through the manufacturer, will ensure the machines continue to perform at the highest level after service.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

A quality distributor will be able to add value beyond the equipment and after-sales service and support it provides.

Whether they're starting from scratch or redesigning a current facility, customers should look to distributors that are able to provide valuable resources including laundry design services and financing options. Once they visit the location and understand the specific needs, a distributor can work with the manufacturer to bring a customer's vision to life.

A 3-D rendering produced with computer-aided design (CAD) can provide a plan to scale that includes everything from the lay-

out of machines, to the location of cabinets, racks and other equipment necessary for the successful operation of the laundry room.

Should funding assistance be required, it's important to consider a distributor whose manufacturing partner provides in-house financing. Specifically tailored to meet unique OPL challenges, the team of financial experts provides one-on-one service before, during and after the application process, which can often be completed online.

While it may require a bit of due diligence, decision makers must be sure to thoroughly vet the equipment and customer service provided by a distributor and its manufacturing partner. After all, it is only the success and reputation of their facility at stake. **ALN**

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