

COIN-OP

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE SELF-SERVICE LAUNDRY INDUSTRY

COIN-OP 101

SEASONAL CHANGES BRING NEW OPPORTUNITIES



Joy McDonald

As the final leaves drop from the trees and the first frost appears, how should Laundromat owners adapt operations for the upcoming season? Each different time of year brings new opportunities for a Laundromat's success, but the trick to maintaining a constant flow of customers is to change with the seasons.

SCALING DOWN AFTER SUMMER

During the summer, some owners adapt their hours to accommodate an influx of tourists. Because of the increase in customers, many Laundromats require additional staff during this time. Start adapting to seasonal changes by scaling back on increased staff during what might be considered an "off-season."

Clark Sowers owns three Laundromats in South Dakota, including East Main Laundry and Dry Cleaning in Sturgis. That location must accommodate a large influx of tourists from May through August for events such as the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, which typically doubles the population of South Dakota during its run.

"During the off-season, we return to normal operation, in that our staffing hours are reduced," Sowers explains. "This staff reduction may mean that an individual's workload increases, as they may be the only person on staff at one Laundromat."

FALL INFLUXES

It is important to be mindful of the possible influx that may accompany the fall.

"I tend to evaluate my coin laundry business in thirds,

rather than the yearly quarters," says Sowers. "January through April includes the final semester of college and the end of winter; May through August are the summer tourist months; and September through December covers the start of school, hunting season, and the holidays."

In the fall, store owners can consider transitioning marketing efforts to target new groups of potential customers. For example, hunting season starts as early as August for bow hunters, with additional seasons extending through January. Due to the soil level and bulkiness of the clothes they wear for this sport, hunters may be reluctant to wash camping gear and hunting clothes in their home machines.

To increase their traffic, store owners can promote the fact that the larger washer-extractors available in their Laundromats can help hunters complete their loads more efficiently than they could at home.

The winter holiday season also brings Sowers an increase in tourists. "We have several customers who manage rental properties that do business with us; some drop off their bedding and some use the Laundromat themselves."

ADAPT TO LOCAL INDUSTRIES

Store owners can also look to local industries to increase off-season customer traffic.

"In our region, there are elements of our business that remain constant, one of which is the local coal miners in Wyoming and now the oil field workers in North Dakota," says Sowers. "We provide year-round drop-



A panorama of the Belle Laundromat, Belle Fourche, S.D., one of Clark Sowers' three South Dakota stores.

Photo: Black Hills Laundry & Dry Cleaning LLC and Alliance Laundry Systems

off service for each of these entities and have even contracted with a few coal mines.”

Maintaining a clean store, with efficient, commercial-quality equipment and with employees who care about the services they are providing is essential. Staff experience, parking availability and quality equipment all help satisfy customer needs.

“The marketing I do among regulars is very simple,” Sowers notes. “I will occasionally buy a customer a wash or two or a bottle of soda or water to let them know we appreciate their business.”

PROVIDE INCENTIVES

Store owners should recognize that some equipment control systems allow additional incentives for bringing in customers.

For example, Laundromats located near college campuses should provide students with budget-friendly options to drive traffic. Time-of-day pricing enables price variations throughout the day, which helps to incentivize customers to patronize the Laundromat during slower traffic time slots, and helps a store compete for new customers. Store owners can also change prices based on water temperature and cycle selections. One control sys-

tem offers 24 customizable cycle selections, which gives customers the ability to optimize wash results for various loads.

These new options provide both money-saving incentives and flexible cycles for consumers, while still offering owners increased revenue. Additionally, some control systems let owners monitor their machines off-site using a computer, and provide reports that analyze equipment performance data and maintenance alerts for ultimate control and convenience.

By recognizing peak seasons and targeting operations and marketing to different year-round customer segments, Laundromat owners can significantly increase their traffic.

Furthermore, by using an intuitive control system, owners can optimize operations and turn off-seasons into opportunities. ■

Jay McDonald has more than 32 years of experience in the laundry industry and is currently serving as interim national sales manager for Huebsch® (www.huebsch.com, 800-553-5120). His primary job is to develop and enhance the distribution of the equipment brand's products in North America. He holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Ripon (Wis.) College.
