



# Customers come first

**Above: view of plant, with Mark Halberstadt in foreground.**

**Below: wash floor crew standing by Braun dryers, with shuttle in centre and washers on the left.**

Mark Halberstadt, president of Faster Linen Service Ltd. may have been trained as an accountant. And he may think in terms of dollars and cents about most aspects of his Faster laundry, linen and uniform business. But when considering an individual problem, the needs of the customer come first. Yet he still keeps a sharp eye on costs, and here are some examples.

## **MANY SAVINGS AVAILABLE**

He knows the penny how much money he is saving by reducing garbage pickups to once a month through condensing his used poly bags into bales and reducing trash to cubes in his Trash-packer compactor.

Then there are the potential savings available by recovering, cleansing and recycling the rinse water from his four new Braun 450-lb. washer/extractors. This represents from 14,000 to 16,000 gallons a day. By re-using the rinse water, Faster can take advantage of a City of Toronto incentive program for saving water. By

metering and documenting the water usage before the rinse water is diverted for re-use, and again when the re-use program is in place, the company estimates it can receive a potential savings of at least \$100,000 a year in rebates at 30 cents per litre saved. And on overall water usage he is already saving because the new open-pocket Brauns use almost one-third less water than his older top-side loader washer/extractors.

## **TUNNEL OR WASHERS?**

Speaking of the four Braun washers, Halberstadt made the decision between purchasing a tunnel washer or individual washer/extractors based first on customer needs. As he explained, "Our customer base is mostly in the hospitality, spa, dental, medical, meat and poultry processing food service and industrial accounts.

"That covers a wide variety of items

from lab coats to banquet tablecloths to bar wipes, kitchen linen, and industrial uniforms. We need to be able to wash each product to its exact specification. That's too much variety to get good quality from a tunnel washer. Also, a tunnel is a single unit instead of four. When you're dependent on one unit, you can't afford shutdowns.

"With our four new washers, which are linked by a shuttle to two 500-lb. Braun dryers, we have flexibility and backup if one is down. They save on labour and utilities while producing excellent quality. If we have a problem, we can hook any unit to a modem and the Braun engineers can diagnose our problem right from the factory.

"We have 10 other washer/extractors in our line that must be loaded and unloaded by hand. The sling system, which brings the work to our four new washers, along with the automatic shuttle system to the dryers, makes us more efficient and should help improve our Workers Compensation statistics."

From the washer/extractors, loads go to one of the seven flatwork ironers, to small-piece folders or through the large Leonard Automatic steam tunnel. As Halberstadt says, "If there is something I can do to enhance the efficiency of the operation and get things from check-in to the front door faster, I do it." But despite this statement of efficiency, customer needs always dictate the scheduling and handling of goods.



**ENTREPRENEURS  
SINCE 1961**

Faster Linen Service Ltd. was started by Halberstadt's grandfather, then run by his late father, and now Mark is president and his brother Jeffrey is his partner and vice-president of operations. They have kept their entrepreneurial edge in doing business. Five years ago they moved into a new 43,000-sq.-ft. facility within 10 minutes of downtown Toronto.

*Fabricare Canada* visited in 2002 to record the public service that the plant performed when it washed free of charge

labour and provide maximum efficiency in utilizing two new 500-lb. Braun dryers.

These efficiencies forced an upgrade in feeding some of the flatwork ironers to keep up with faster delivery of laundered goods, as well as the installation of a large steam tunnel to finish uniforms and lab coats. And this forced a computerized assembly, sorting and distribution conveyor.

But quality has not been sacrificed to efficiency. There are 10 other washers handling smaller loads, which require specialized formulas. And there

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the mud-soaked sleeping bags owned by the city and left behind following a visit by Pope John Paul II. At that time the plant was operating with older equipment.

Since then management has been upgrading equipment. Halberstadt's philosophy is, "The cost of utilities and labour are rising continually. Whenever the synergy of benefits from new equipment, justified by the poundage we are handling, show that we need something new, we try to buy it."

This is how the decision to upgrade the wash floor was implemented. First a large steel superstructure was installed at the ceiling to handle the sling system delivering work from the sorting area. Then the Braun washers were selected on the basis of high quality and total utility savings. The shuttle conveyor was added to save

are three flatwork ironers that are fed manually to obtain maximum quality. "We serve many fine restaurants presided over by European chefs, who are very demanding. We try to make sure we can satisfy them at all times," stated Halberstadt.

Faster Linen Service Ltd.'s business is comprised of 90% rental, and 10% customer goods. That's a big juggling act to balance utilities and labour against quality demands. But as you look out over the enormous plant, you feel it is all under control. Halberstadt's basic operating philosophy is that if management can come up with a new idea about operating the business better every day, it will be successful. And that attitude is projecting the company into more success in 2007. ■

Workers hand sheets to new Jensen feeder.



## The old-fashioned way

Despite all the new equipment in the Faster Linen plant, some items are still handled the way they were 50 years ago. For example, round tablecloths are fed and folded by hand. They are then placed on hangers and bagged with poly for delivery.



1. Feeding a round tablecloth into the flatwork ironer.
2. Folding the cloth is a two-person job.
3. Hangered cloths, covered in poly, awaiting delivery to a banquet.