

How to Sell Cleaning for Health

By Dave Frank

In 1994 Dr. Michael Berry introduced the book, *Protecting the Built Environment, Cleaning for Health*. This comprehensive publication is the bible for high performance health buildings and the “green” movement in the sanitary supply industry. In addition to this valuable resource, Research Triangle Institute or some refer to the document as the Frank Porter Graham Study released a scientific data demonstrating how best practices in cleaning, low impact chemicals and innovative equipment reduced airborne dust, volatile organic compounds, and fungus and bacteria levels. Eleven years later our industry has captured the strategic benefits improved hygiene, worker safety and occupant wellness. As industry leaders all we must go beyond tactical definitions and promote the fundamental values of cleanliness and sanitation. Cleaning is a common thread in the fabric of our society. We witness cleaning activities every area of business and our communities.

Not only is proper hygiene a value, but corporations and government agencies view cleanliness as means to avoid risk, reduce litigation and prevent public relation disasters associated with cross contaminations or epidemics that can impact tourism dollars or revenue. We have all witness what can happen when health risks cause consumers to change their buying habits or travel schedules. The Norwalk Virus, SARS and other incidents hit global televisions stations only to substantiate the value of best practices in sanitation and proper hygiene.

The Customer Decides

For the past 20 year we have observed corporations add cleanliness to their mission statements, tag lines and newsletters. Many hotel chains, restaurants, grocers, convenience stores and other have not only cleaned up their image to attract customers, but they published statements defining their commitment to protecting the environment, reducing waste and purchasing products that are safe for the environment. Those organizations that don't recognize the consumer demand to protect the environment may experienced public outcry that was demonstrated when a global fast food chain was using packaging that was perceived as bad for the environment and increasing the use of landfills.

Opportunity Lose

In interviews with manufacturers, distributors executives, sales people and facility service providers, there appears to be a disconnect in the channel regarding the sustainability of the green movement and the health benefits from new cleaning technologies. Many distributors and manufacturers claim that customers are not asking for green chemistry, paper with post and pre consumer content, bacteria reducing textiles, and tools and equipment that conserve water and capture harmful contaminates. The cavern between the supplier community and customer's issues widens each years as we battle on the streets with our competitors for product sales, managing multiple price increases and focus on tactical sale strategies. What we define as valuable for our business, may not be important to our customer. Most facility service providers want suppliers that are focus on their needs and business concerns. Listing skills, note taking and follow through demonstrate a general regard for the customer and is allows us the opportunity to make a meaning contribution to their operations. The sanitary supply business is one of the few industry where we can reduce the over all operational cost to our customers and increase our margin through product innovation and an intimate knowledge of our customer's business.

Cleaning Sciences

Are you a student of the industry or have commitment yourself to propagating commodity products and competing on price? Have you accessed the standards from the US Green Building Council that dedicate over 10 pages to improving cleaning operations in order to certify a building? Do you have the EPA Tools for Schools kit for improving indoor quality in educational facilities? Have you read the industry journals, attended seminars and studied the manufacturer environmental brochures that detail how their products meet new green standards. If you want to be a resource to your customer you must know as much or more about their operation and how your product lines and services will furnish meaningful solutions.



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How to Approach and Assess Your Customer

Attempting to sell single items or product line will not be enough to compel a customer to make changes in their purchasing habits. Many salespeople said, "We brought in the green products and the customer wasn't interested. We demonstrated the vacuum with high filtration and the customer didn't want to spend more money." These are common objections from customers when we pitch products without understanding the customers' perceptions, budget restraints and objectives. It is not the customer's job to be understood. It is our job to understand the customer and to be understood in order to make a sale. Before we rush into the account with product we must have a general conversation with our customers to ask questions, define objectives and sell the "why to" of a comprehensive cleaning for health systems approach to healthy buildings.

Dollarization Disciplines

Many manufacturers have created computer calculators that aid in the sales process of environmentally preferred products. As an example waterless urinals can save a facility over 40,000 gallons of water per year for each urinal. Touchless faucets and automatic flushing devices not only enhance hygiene and reduce cross contamination, but the annual saving to the facility for water can be in the tens of thousands per year. Customers want data and return of investment calculations help offset the cost of a capital investment.

Ultra high speed floor machines and battery power burnishers with passive or active shrouds reduce dust circulation by over 50%. This also reduces labor dollars associated with additional dust in buildings. High filtration vacuums that meet the standards set by the Carpet and Rug Institute green label criteria for vacuums not only reduce dust in buildings, but the average commercial worker operates a vacuum 2- 4 hours per day, whereas the average home owner uses a vacuum about 20-30 minutes per week. This reduces worker exposure to contaminants and dust. Inhaling dust and atomized chemicals can cause respiratory symptoms causing increases illness and absenteeism.

Micro fiber technology is the best product advancement our industry has seen in 20 years. Not only does it perform better than disposable rags, but the capillary effect of the synthetic filaments creates a high absorbency and superior agitation while it conserves water during the cleaning process. In addition to superior performance, MicroFiber cleaning textiles have extended life cycles so they outlast conventional mops and rags 10:1. Products with extended life cycles reduce products from the waste stream and reduce long term costs. Managers have also found that micro fiber can increase worker morale and attitudes because it performs better and has more diverse cleaning applications.

Cylindrical Brush technology also reduces water consumption on automatic scrubber by over 30%. Some manufacturers are promoting low moisture for floor maintenance and carpet care to reduce water consumption for daily and weekly cleaning tasks. The US Green Building Council and EPA EPP encourage low moisture systems to meet their environmental preferred criteria.

Reducing Work Related Injuries

Cleaning workers are susceptible to work related injuries. OSHA places cleaning workers, housekeepers and custodians in the top 10 for workplace injuries. Many organization can incur tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars in worker compensation cost, temporary worker wages, lost productivity and rehabilitation costs due to on the job injuries. This is quantifiable bottom line number for administrators.

A cleaning for health program is proven to reduce work related injuries. Low impact and biobased chemicals approved by EPA Designed for the Environment program and / or products certified by Green Seal meet the criteria for safe formulations. When properly used they reduce potential hazards and exposure. In addition to this significant savings, administrators are faced with rising health insurance rates. Focusing on safe environmentally preferred products, best practices and safety procedures can save an organization hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.



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Poor Practices

Operations that use dated technology and conventional cleaning techniques have a tendency to redistribute soil, bacteria move dirt around a building. Poor practices and “dirty cleaning tools” create the need for expensive project work that requires additional labor, harsh chemicals and other additional products. Many cleaning managers do not see these symptom until it is too late and then expensive project work is required to bring an area, floor or carpet up to maintainable standard. This can increase the annual labor and supply cost in a facility by over 10%. Lower overall cost can be accomplished by “measuring it twice and cutting it once” as a carpenter once told me. Custodial generated soil will not only create inconsistence results and occupant complaints, but most workers do not like to perform unnecessary project work. In addition to better practices, the global color code standard for cleaning tools prescribed by the British Institute for Cleaning Sciences is making its way to the United States. Many operations have improving training and reduce potential hazards of cross contamination caused by moving substances from high risk areas to low risk surfaces. This is a common practice for food operations. Cutting boards are color codes for pork, poultry and red meat preparations. In Germany cleaning workers wear color coded gloves to reduce contamination when sanitizing restrooms.

Day Job

Many self appointed experts want to debate the benefits of “Day Cleaning”. This is base on empirical opinion. The largest cost to commercial buildings is energy. There is a light fixture for every fifty square feet of space. The single tenant facilities that move their cleaning operation from nights to day did so to bring a hundred thousand dollars or more per building in energy savings to the bottom line. In addition to energy saving that also discovered labor reductions using cooperative cleaning systems in a day cleaning environment. The business manager brought this saving to the bottom line to increase corporate profit through lowering operating costs.

Do the Math

Cleaning for health and green products do not have a higher cost, they actually will save a cleaning operation tens of thousands of dollars per year. To increase the sale of products that meet the criteria and standards we must understand our customer’s cost and be in a position to dollarize bottom line savings. We know that there are innumerable benefits to cleaning for health such as reduced occupant illnesses, increasing student attendance and productivity enhancements, but direct cost saving is the best way to present the case for high performance healthy buildings. After we define the cost benefit to the customer, then they are in a better position to make a purchasing decision base on facts and figures.

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