

# Luxury Linens

## Here to Stay

*Booming hotel market  
not looking at high-end textiles  
as just a fad anymore*



*Budget/economy hotels are following the trend and upgrading their bedding textiles, like Microtel with its Dream Well bedding package.*



*A display of the various shades of high-end comforters hotels are using. Production issues related to laundering these and other luxury linens are creating opportunities for textile service companies.*

**By Matt Alexander**

**W**ith strong occupancy and average daily revenue growing, hotel chains are not only continuing to enhance their bedding packages but also are adding luxury linens in their spas and health clubs. The “bed wars” that have recently been raging in the hotel business are expanding into the “spa and amenity wars.” These “wars” have been the most significant trend for hotel laundries and textile service companies serving the hospitality market in the last 40 years. But luxury linen is more than just a trend. The use of high-end textiles in hotels is not showing any signs of declining and will have an even greater impact on the hospitality textile maintenance sector in the future.

### **From heavenly beds to heavenly spas**

All of the major full-service hotel companies now have branded bed packages and many are still engaged in a system-wide rollout of these goods. In the market, virtually all renovations include upgrad-

ed beds and bathrooms along with spas and health clubs. For example, in a recent \$100 million renovation announced by Downtown Disney Resort Area Hotels<sup>1</sup> the consortium of seven hotels in Lake Buena Vista, FL each decided to upgrade bedding as part of their enhancements. Among them, Doubletree installed Sweet Dreams by Doubletree, The Buena Vista Palace Hotel & Spa added beds with Pacific Coast pillows and duvets, Hilton improved rooms with their Hilton Serenity Collection, and The Royal Plaza outfitted oversized guest rooms with over-stuffed, pillow-top Royal Beds and premium linens.

Beyond sleeping rooms, the “spa wars” are the new frontier in the marketing of hotels. Just as Westin transformed the industry with the “Heavenly Bed,” the “Heavenly Spa” and “Heavenly Meal” will eventually follow as hotels continue to define their brand, differentiating themselves by enhancing the guest experience. For example, Willow Stream, Fairmont Hotels’ spa brand, recently announced an improved spa treatment bed, the Willow Stream Spa Experience Bed. It is reported to be longer, wider and extra plush so

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that all spa guests feel comfortable.<sup>2</sup>

Even budget/economy hotels are engaging in the “bed wars.” Microtel recently announced its new bedding experience, Dream Well,<sup>3</sup> which is reported to include a fresh, white look, plush-top mattress pad, high quality 200-thread count white and khaki-piped linens with triple sheeting, down-like blanket, decorative top sheet and bed scarf, and high quality pillows. This follows in the footsteps

cycle than the products they replaced; there are even instances of luxury textiles needing to be discarded after as few as 33% of the expected washings. The results have led to skyrocketing textile replacement costs as well as higher laundering costs due to the greater amount of pounds being processed and the care needed to launder those items.

Some hotels and casinos are now looking to reduce their replace-



*Doubletree is among the latest group of hoteliers to upgrade their bedding packages. The company's Sweet Dreams by Doubletree collection can be found in guestrooms throughout the chain as well as for purchase online. Doubletree is among seven hotels at Downtown Disney Resort Area Hotels that decided to enhance their linen.*

of announcements by Holiday Inn, Hampton Inns and others. From first glance, the budget/economy hotel bed packages mimic those of the luxury hotel brands.

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One example of the new luxury line is within The Thompson Hotel Group, which recently announced a partnership with Sferra to introduce an “exceptional 400 thread-count sheeting.”<sup>4</sup>

**High end = high cost to hoteliers**

We are seeing several changes emerging as a result of the costs associated with the “bed wars.” Some of the initial luxury linen purchases hotels made to upgrade textiles—beautiful, decorator-quality retail products—had durability issues and did not stand up to the commercial laundering process. The result was a much shorter life

ment costs by purchasing more durable textiles, including high thread count blended sheets that generally last longer than a 100% cotton product. The high

cost of textiles has also reduced in-circulation inventory because hoteliers are attempting to control costs at the expense of having an adequate inventory of textiles. This effort to control expenses by reducing textile purchases has led to a significant increase in operating costs for hotels that are often desperate to rein in textile replacements. We call the lack of circulating inventory “The Hidden Octopus” because the impact of inadequate inventory levels reaches into multiple areas of a hotel’s operations much like the tentacles of an octopus. One of the byproducts is the effect on guests. We believe the single greatest reason for guests being



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delayed at check-in is the lack of in-circulation inventory delaying rooms from being made-up. The consequences are often a black eye for the laundry operation and the hotel. Other examples of increased operational costs include staff tension and textile replacement costs that result from textiles being kept in constant circulation.

Additionally, new standards in bedding linen is also causing hotels to either invest in upgraded laundry systems, change laundry suppli-

their in-house laundries. (TRSA has publications available to help textile service companies show hoteliers the true cost of operating their in-house laundry.)

Operators, though, have some good arguments to make. First, hotel managers respond well when discussing alternative, revenue-generating uses for the current space occupied by an on-premise laundry. Also, because hotel laundries may need to be upgraded to



*The new front in the battle by hoteliers to get customers through enhanced services is in the spa. Spa beds that are longer, wider and topped with finer textiles are among some of the upgrades tourists will find in many properties today.*

ers or close their on-premise laundries. With larger sheeting, increased poundage and the introduction of specialty linens, many hotel laundries find they do not have the equipment, space or expertise needed to adequately process these high-end items. Due to the demands of processing luxury textiles, there is a renewed interest in exploring outsourcing as an alternative to making substantial capital investments in the laundry.

**Making the case for outsourcing**

The trouble hoteliers are having processing high-end textiles for guest rooms, spas and health clubs is an opportunity for textile service companies to gain a better foothold in the hotel market. The challenge operators will face is that hotels are concerned about costs and often have an unrealistic view of their own in-house laundry expenses, which taints their opinion when a textile service company provides a fair bid. For example, when comparing their OPL costs to outsourcing, hotel managers may fail to assign rent and depreciation charges or a real estate value for the space used by

meet the demands of processing luxury linen, textile service companies can make the claim that it is more cost effective to outsource rather than spend capital on upgrading a part of the hotel that does not generate revenue. Another important consideration is that hotels want to find service partners who share their culture of service, quality and customer satisfaction. Operators should address the needs of the hoteliers based on the impact the decision will have on the customer experience.

Before jumping into the luxury linen fray, commercial laundries need to be prepared to work closely with their hotel customers to develop strong systems to account for the distribution and use of these expensive items. Frequent inventory audits and on-going infusions of new linen will help create strong partnerships that result in effective value for the hotelier and profitable business for textile service companies.

**Learn more at the Clean Show**

The future is ripe with opportunities and rich in demands for laun-

dry and textile professionals now serving or looking to service the luxury linen market. Staying on top of the trend and understanding the impact it is having on hotels and laundries is critical. A great way to learn more and see if this market is a fit for your company is during the upcoming Clean Show. On Tuesday, June 12 at 8 a.m., TRSA will host a seminar on luxury linens at the Las Vegas Convention Center. The seminar will explore how to tackle, serve and thrive in this emerging market. There is no charge to attend the seminar. For more information, contact George Ferencz at 877/770-9274 or e-mail [gferencz@trsa.org](mailto:gferencz@trsa.org).

We have all heard the catchphrase that education is the key to the future. Understanding the impact luxury linen has on



operations and inventory is a key to seizing this opportunity that the hospitality industry is presenting. **TR**



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