ABOVE: The screens above offer staff real-time reporting of production information for tunnel washers and finishing machinery in this hospitality laundry plant in Baltimore operated by Commercial Laundry Corp. The tracking capability helps reward staff who are meeting their goals. Those who are not meeting their goals get extra training or are reassigned to equipment where they can improve their performance.

ADVANCED TRACKING—
'DO THINGS BETTER, FASTER AND MORE EFFICIENTLY'

Baltimore operator leverages technology to boost performance through better tracking of machinery, staff metrics

By Jack Morgan

Was there any upside to the COVID-19 pandemic? Certainly, nothing could compensate for the lost lives and economic devastation wrought by the virus itself and the lockdowns and supply-chain headaches it triggered. However, on a recent visit to Commercial Laundry Corp., Baltimore, we saw how this hospitality operator seized opportunities during the pandemic slowdown to fine-tune its operations for long-term growth.

Specifically, CEO Brandon Rosenblatt described how he and his team are working with a Microsoft Power BI program to pilot the development of an advanced "dashboard" capability that will give staff and managers a clearer and more comprehensive view of productivity metrics. "We finished our big renovation project," says Rosenblatt, speaking of a series of machinery upgrades that were ongoing when

the pandemic hit in March 2020 (see related story, "Commercial Laundry—Bullish on Baltimore and Beyond," pg. 22, December 2020, *Textile Services*). "A lot of it, of course, has to do with the equipment that we installed. But part of it has to do with us being able to not have to focus on just getting the work done. Now that we have the resources of equipment to do the work efficiently, we used a lot of the time during COVID to invest our time and energy into understanding our business and our metrics."

IMPROVED REPORTING

The plant already has eVue tracking from Kannegiesser ETECH. This purchase came at the same time as the company's recent acquisition of four Kannegiesser quad towel folders. The eVue system reports on productivity in every machine in the plant, including a Pellerin Milnor and a Lavetec tunnel washer, a Chicago Dryer Co ironer and four

Kannegiesser ironers, plus a soil-sorting system from a Dutch manufacturer. While the eVue system was helpful, Rosenblatt wanted to extend the company's tracking capabilities to include information from its customer-owned textile goods for hotel clients, as well as payroll information on employee hours. The goal is to get more detailed reporting available sooner in order to address problems faster. That, in turn, could boost pounds per operator hour (PPOH). The system—which should come online later this year—will provide more information on "Everything between when people walk in and what we ship out the door," Rosenblatt says. The system will record, "All the inputs of what we need to be able to figure out how we could do things better, smarter, faster, and more efficiently. So we've integrated our time clock. eVue manages the equipment performance as well as the individual operator performance at each piece of equipment." Another key component of the company's improved reporting capabilities was its laundry-management software provider, which enhanced its billing/invoicing services with custom features created for Commercial.

This technology could aid productivity by giving managers more information, sooner, on whether a machine or a given employee is processing goods at or below the company's standards, which are set based on time studies of the company's experienced employees. "I want to be able to look at what the machine should be doing," Rosenblatt says. "I want to look at what the people should be doing. If the machine isn't working right, the people aren't going to hit their goals."

Making sure that employees meet or exceed their production standards is critical because virtually everyone in this plant is incentivized for maximum throughput. "We're commissioning people off of hitting their goals," he says. "So it's not fair to them if they're on a machine that's not doing what it's supposed to be doing. That would

impact their bonus. So everybody is aligned to get everything going right."

For example, let's say a staff member is making 70% of their production standard for sheet feeding. However, the machine keeps dropping sheets because a small piece of lint is covering an electric eye that guides the sheet into the ironer after feeding. If Commercial Laundry can get that information faster, it can alert maintenance to fix the problem and get the employee back on course to earn their "efficiency bonus." Rosenblatt notes that obtaining this intelligence faster is critical for everyone, particularly for maintenance issues that are easily remedied.

BOOSTING MORALE AND PPOH

During a visit to Commercial Laundry's plant, we asked General Manager Ed Yacobozzi about the production staff's view of the incentive program and recent system upgrades. He says staff appreciate the opportunity to earn more. Nearly 90%-95% of the plant's 125 employees are incentivized. Rosenblatt adds that the program generally has boosted morale. "We haven't gotten any negative pushback from people having the option to make more money," he says. "It's not like the people who aren't hitting standard are getting less money than they were getting prior to these standards being in place. So could there be some jealousy among some? You can't please everybody. But I think it's more important to make sure that those who are doing a really stellar job are recognized, and they know that they're appreciated, than to worry about people who aren't hitting standard." Besides, knowing as soon as possible that a given employee is performing below standard alerts management to provide extra training for that person, or perhaps to assign them a different machine where they'll do better. Commercial Laundry extensively cross-trains its staff as well to fill in for absent co-workers, or if the machine they normally work on requires

maintenance. "That's the way to maximize PPOH," says Rosenblatt. When staff are absent from work, "You have to improvise, and you need people to be trained so that they can be productive on every piece of equipment."

The 40,000-square-foot (3,716-square-meter) plant currently is processing 6,200 lbs. per hour (2,818 kg.). and producing around 90% of the total weekly pounds it processed pre-COVID, Rosenblatt says. That rate is expected to reach 7,200 per hour (3,265 kg.) as demand rises, economies of scale kick in and staff fine-tune their processes.

While COVID remains a concern, Rosenblatt believes that the hotel market in the Baltimore/Washington DC area could a full recovery in the coming months. When that happens, Rosenblatt expects the plant will reach a PPOH rate of 160 lbs. (72 kg.). That's up from about 145 lbs. (65 kg.) currently. Yacobozzi says the company has nearly doubled its number of customers since COVID hit two years ago.

Rosenblatt says this new business represents a combination of hotels that closed OPLs and contracts won from rival laundries. Amid housekeeping-staff shortages, hotels are now using less linen than pre-COVID, he says. "The total pounds that we're producing is around 90% of what we were doing in 2019, but we're doing it with almost twice the number of customers. Which means that we believe that when the world comes back, we're going to be in really good shape." For example, Rosenblatt cites the recent addition of the Lavatec tunnel with 14, 130 lb. (59 kg) modules. The Microsoft Power BI installation is the latest improvement. It's aimed at boosting this plant's competitiveness through enhanced productivity tracking, thus helping to fuel growth. "I'm hoping that this year we'll get to one-and-a-half times what we did in 2019," Rosenblatt says. "We hope it's just a matter of time." **TS**

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