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Dry Cleaners Embrace Laundry Ownership for Surprising Gains

By Haley Jorgensen



Vended
Laundry Profile

Jim Croyle and his wife, Theresa, recently opened a small, high-speed laundry next to their dry cleaning plant in Tallmadge, Ohio. The new vended laundry, designed for speed, efficiency and customer convenience, is growing 18 percent month-over-month and after just 6 months, contributes 7 percent of total company revenue. At this rate, the Croyles expect a full return on investment in just 5 years.

Multi-Generational Business

Like many dry cleaners in the industry, White Swan Cleaners is vested in history. It's a multi-generational company purchased by Jim's mother in 1979, then by himself in 2008. His grandmother, grandfather and great-grandfather all have ties to dry cleaning. Today, White Swan Cleaners includes a central dry cleaning plant, two drop stores and one vended laundry. Services include dry cleaning, shirt cleaning, alterations, drop-off wash/dry/fold and residential pickup and delivery.

Downturn in Dry Cleaning Spurs Interest in Laundry

A dip in dry cleaning business spurred the Croyles' interest in opening a laundry. "We had an empty spot in our retail strip mall next to the dry cleaning plant," said Jim. "Covid hit and our dry cleaning business dropped 60-70 percent. Our 1,100 dress shirts a day dropped by half. We stayed open processing clothes and medical facility goods and tried to keep as many of our employees as possible. A laundry seemed like a good solution."

The Croyles aren't alone. A growing number of dry cleaning operators find the laundry business appealing, according to Jim. "It can complement the business done by a dry cleaner, while offering new revenue streams with a much lower labor demand," he said.

In the case of White Swan Laundromat, it also allowed staff to switch from the dry cleaning side to the laundry side, offered high-speed equipment for self-service use and processing full-service wash/dry/fold, and helped grow pickup and delivery service. "It's been a great crossover for us," said Jim.

Laundry Vision

To make their laundry idea a reality, the Croyles worked closely with Eric Vlahos of Advantage Equipment, a laundry solutions provider in Akron, Ohio. Vlahos provided a pro forma, financing assistance, laundry designs, equipment and more. "The Vlahos family owns and



operates a laundry so Eric understood what we needed and helped us with every aspect of the laundry's development," said Jim.

The Croyles started small — walling off half of the available space for future expansion. "We built the store with the intention of growing," said Jim. "We can double the size overnight and go from 17 to 34 washers."

In and Out in 60 Minutes or Less

The 1,500-square foot White Swan Laundromat is located in a strip mall owned by the Croyles in an upscale suburban neighborhood.



It features a mix of Continental Girbau high-speed ExpressWash® Washers and ExpressDry® Dryers for a quicker wash and dry; a Card Concepts Inc. FasCard payment system that accepts cash, debit/credit and payment apps; and a security system that automatically locks and unlocks the laundry. Amenities include free WIFI, large flatscreen televisions and folding tables.

The soft-mount ExpressWash Washers, in 20- to 80-pound capacities, are complemented by 45-pound capacity stack dryers and 75-pound capacity, single-pocket dryers. The soft-mount machines offer easy installation without bolt-down and the washers generate up to 408 G-force extract speeds for more moisture removal, quicker drying times and lower natural gas consumption.

"Fifty percent of our wash cycles are 18 minutes and our dry cycles are 20-30 minutes," said Jim. "Our customers are in and out in less than an hour, which saves them 2-3 hours over our competition."

Moreover, a faster wash and dry maximizes customer rotation rates, frees up popular machines and helps boost revenue. "The washers can conceivably turn three times per hour and that's what we are hoping for," said Jim. "We love the soft-mount washers. I know what it's like to run second extracts on a down comforter because it's still wet. Our dry cleaning washers only spin at 200 G-force. The amount of money, time and energy our ExpressWash Washers save on the drying end is amazing."

'Extras' add to Total Revenue

Plus, customers can choose optional "Extras," in addition to their standard cycles, including an "Extra Rinse," "Extra Wash," and "Extra Spin." Each "Extra" vends at an additional 50 cents — padding store profit. "This absolutely offers our customers more control over how they're laundry is washed," said Jim, "with 18 percent choosing an 'Extra Wash,' 15 percent selecting an 'Extra Rinse' and another 15 percent adding an 'Extra Spin.'"

Technology Simplifies Tasks

With labor shortages continuing nationwide, the demand for automated services has become very commonplace and easy to implement into daily operations, according to Jim. "In our personal laundry experience, we have automated several of the daily tasks."

Simplifying life, the laundry's security technology automatically opens doors at 6 a.m. and locks them at 10 p.m. At 9 p.m., it alerts customers through Alexa of the last wash. Simultaneously, lights illuminate and turn off automatically. Every half hour, team members from the dry cleaning plant walk over and tend the laundry or use idle washers to process wash/dry/fold.

Meanwhile, the laundry's FasCard payment system offers simple machine operation for customers and provides sophisticated store management. Using FasCard, the Croyles can run promotions, access customer information, issue refunds and analyze machine operation and store performance and revenue.

Finally, the laundry also harnesses the dry cleaning plant's SMRT point of sale system to track wash/dry/fold poundage, text updates to customers and send pickup and delivery reminders. When customers don't have a pickup, the software automatically drops them from the manifest, which in turn reduces vehicle wear and tear, labor hours and fuel.

Shared Resources for More Efficient Businesses

At the end of the day, the dry cleaning side complements the laundry side and vice versa — allowing for more efficient use of labor, equipment, technology, delivery routes and marketing. Working together, the businesses share resources while creating a bigger customer pool and diversification of services.

"The addition of the laundry, especially directly next door to our main plant, has led to many crossover customers," said Jim. "Our dry cleaning customers have learned of our wash/dry/fold services and are adding it to the services they already use. Similarly, our laundry customers coming to the dry cleaner with their finer clothes to be professionally cleaned and pressed, are learning of our other services, including alterations and household item cleaning."

Growth into the Future

Ultimately, the Croyles plan to expand their laundry footprint, first by doubling the size of the current laundry. They'll do this by removing the "phase 1" wall and adding equipment. Thereafter, they hope to develop laundries in neighboring communities that need "good, clean laundries," said Jim.

To learn more about White Swan Cleaners and Laundromat, visit drycleanohio.com. To discover more about Continental Girbau laundry equipment — backed by industry-leading warranties — visit continentalgirbau.com or call 800-256-1073.