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How Green Cleaning Changed the Building Service Contracting Industry...for the better

Back before many of my readers were born, an unusual subdivision of the professional cleaning industry began to emerge. What were eventually called "janitorial brokers" first made headway in the late 1970s in parts of California.

Janitorial brokers are similar to stockbrokers, but instead of selling stocks, they sell (and sometimes buy) janitorial contracts to clean and maintain all kinds of locations: offices, schools, sometimes entire buildings. Essentially they bid on a facility's cleaning needs and if they win the bid, the broker turns around and sells the contract to a building service contractor (BSC), who then provides cleaning services for the client per the contract and at the amount quoted.

For a long time the concept worked well because many mom-and-pop BSCs either did not have the time or the marketing expertise to seek new clients. They were quite willing to pay for cleaning contracts. As for the broker, it proved to be a very lucrative business with few if any of the ongoing challenges of servicing a client for many months if not several years.

However, for the client, it could be a mixed bag. Many times it did work well. To win contracts, the broker would very often bid low, sometimes quite significantly, making it hard for the BSC to profit from the account. If the agreement could not be renegotiated at some later date between the BSC and the client, the quality of service would often decline due to the financial constraints of the bid or the contractor would simply walk away from the contract—either way making both parties losers.

Sustainability
A FAD?

Just like that
"internet thing",
right?

But, there is something much bigger going on here that actually invited the concept of janitorial brokers into the professional cleaning industry. For decades, many facility managers had a low image of cleaning contractors. Further, they anticipated changing services again in a short time, so price was their central concern. The low bid won the contract and this fed the market for janitorial brokers.

However, in the past few years there has been a change and it is directly connected to the advancement in Green cleaning. Very simply, astute facility managers became more aware that cleaning plays a major role in protecting health – of building occupants and visitors– as well as the environment, and is a key component of their sustainability initiatives. Further, they became more aware of the potential hazards of some conventional cleaning chemicals, equipment, and procedures.

Because of this, they looked for BSCs that could provide a healthier, safer alternative and, importantly, they would pay more for it. This has helped elevate the professional cleaning industry like never before because cleaning now was a health issue, with cleaning costs—while still a concern—no longer the customer's key concern.

Fitting into Their New Shoes

The conversion to Green also meant BSCs had to make changes and a lot of these changes revolved around education and training, both of which have long been undervalued in the professional cleaning industry. According to one estimate, only about 10 percent of cleaning workers in the United States receive any type of formal training in cleaning, and far fewer receive any form of cleaning certification.

It appears Green cleaning has changed this as it has changed so many other aspects of the cleaning industry. It soon became evident that switching from conventional to Green cleaning meant far more than just selecting environmentally preferable cleaning products. It meant such things as:

- Understanding what is Green and Green Cleaning
- Understanding why use Green cleaning products, procedures, equipment, tasks, work-loading, etc.
- Understanding what Green certification entails and why it is important
- Understanding how to use cleaning chemicals safely and more effectively
- Discovering the importance of proper dilution of cleaning chemicals
- Understanding the need for an integrated comprehensive approach to Green cleaning involving not just chemicals, but entrance matting systems, microfiber, high-filtration vacuum cleaners and floor machines with vacuum systems, among others.

- Developing ways to reduce floor refinishing cycles to help reduce floor care's impact on the environment
- Selecting a distributor and chemical manufacturer that are Green cleaning experts to help educate BSCs and meet their Green cleaning challenges

This last item is of particular significance. Before Green cleaning, there were relatively few ongoing training programs specifically for cleaning workers. However, as Green cleaning has advanced, more manufacturers, distributors and organizations such as ISSA have introduced an abundance of training and certification programs. In fact it could be argued that the CIMS certification* program developed by ISSA has its roots in the Green cleaning movement.

How to Sell Yourself in the New Green Cleaning Environment

I once knew a carpet cleaner who charged almost double what other carpet cleaners charged, worked in the finest sections of his city, and was always booked at least a week or two in advance. He was able to do this because he stressed quality and professionalism...and that is what he provided his clients. When meeting with a new client, the first thing he would discuss was his training and certifications, not so much to impress the client as to assure the client he was a professional and was there to provide his customers with the best carpet cleaning possible.

Green cleaning can and is having a similar impact for BSCs. Even in a difficult economy, more and more BSCs report the bid price is no longer the customer's key concern when selecting a cleaning contractor. Instead, quality service and expertise are now given far more value—which customers now appear willing to pay for. And much of this can be attributed to Green cleaning.

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*ISSA's [Cleaning Industry Management Standards \(CIMS\)](#) program verifies that the BSC or FSP has policies and procedures in place to train cleaning workers as well as their management; that tracks results to deliver consistent quality cleaning standards to meet the customer's needs and expectations; uses proven Green products, and much more.

Information courtesy of Enviro-Solutions

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