



The Past, Present And Future Of Floor Machines

Walking into most facilities, the first thing we usually notice—or at least what may make the most significant impact—are the floors. Depending on the type of facility, they can determine if we like, do not like, trust, do not trust, want to live, work, learn, or do business with this facility. Not only are they a first impression, often they are a lasting impression.

Of the estimated 70 billion square feet of commercial space in the United States, there are billions of square feet of hard surface flooring. This means they are a major cleaning concern for most building service contractors (BSCs), especially because their appearance is of such high importance.

While most people assume that hard surface flooring is easier to maintain than carpet, in a commercial setting, that is often not the case. Carpets can actually absorb certain soils and contaminants before they become visible or create a safety hazard. This is not true of hard-surface floors, which means they tend to require considerably more care and labor. In addition they require the use of some of the most powerful—and potentially harmful—cleaning chemicals in the janitor industry.

Because of these issues, BSC's have long sought the development of more efficient, productive, and lately, healthier floor care equipment. Fortunately, new floor care technologies have been developed to make floor care more efficient, less labor intensive, and "Greener" to boot.

A Brief History Of Floor Machines

The first popularly used electric-powered floor machines were introduced in the U.S. in the early 1900s, at about the same time that the first upright vacuum cleaners were introduced for residential and commercial use. These rotary machines had a disk that rotated at approximately 175 rotations per minute (RPM), which is about the speed of most standard buffers today. These early machines, however, had wheels that remained stationary and did not lift up while the machine was being used.

These early floor machines were heavy, with the bulk of the weight on the wheels and not on the rotary disk, and lacked sufficient speed as well as the pressure to produce a high-gloss shine. The major benefit of these machines for the BSC was that they no longer had to polish floors by hand.

By the 1920s, floor machines were redesigned so that more of the weight was on the rotary disk and the rear wheels lifted during operation. These features helped the machine be more effective in scrubbing, stripping, and polishing floors. Unfortunately, it also made the machines more difficult to use. In fact, operating a standard buffer is often compared to riding a wild bull at a rodeo.

After World War II, several new floor types were introduced as well as polymer technology—a new type of



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