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What's Happening in the Carpet Cleaning World?

By Dawn Shoemaker — posted 08/10/2011



Although the carpet cleaning industry is not technically part of the jansan industry, it is closely tied nonetheless. Most carpet cleaning technicians select their chemicals, equipment, tools, and supplies working with jansan distributors, most of whom are members of ISSA.

This means the health of the carpet cleaning industry can have a direct impact on jansan distributors. The better carpet cleaning businesses are doing, the

more they will need chemicals, tools, and even new equipment; if business is down, well, the opposite is true.

So what is happening in the carpet cleaning industry? We know the economic downturn has impacted businesses nationwide, including most segments of the jansan industry. But little attention has been placed on the carpet cleaning industry.

The following, an interview with Mark Warner, the director of training for Enviro-Solutions and president of the Low Moisture Carpet Cleaners Association (LMCCA) and Mickey McKee, vice president of sales and marketing for U.S. Products and HydraMaster, should bring us up to speed.

What impact has the economic downturn had on the carpet cleaning industry?

McKee: In 2008 and 2009, the impact was fairly significant. Back then, there was a lot of uncertainty about how bad things might get, which slowed things down for many carpet cleaners. But it is the downturn in the real estate industry that has had some of the most long-term negative impacts. Having carpets cleaned before people buy and sell homes is commonplace, and some carpet cleaners count on this service for their bread and butter. When real estate transactions came to a standstill, that hurt a lot of [carpet cleaning] companies.

Warner: We also saw a lot of new people opening shop. This has happened before. When the economy takes a nosedive, people decide to go into business for themselves, and carpet cleaning is one of those businesses at the top of the list. Many of these [operations] do not last. But while they are in the industry, they put a lot of pressure on the professionals that have been around for years and plan to be in business for years to come.

What do you see happening right now?

McKee: Things have picked up, no question, but they are still not humming along as

they were pre-2007. Technicians who depended on real estate transactions for the bulk of their business have had to look for new windows of opportunity. Some have refocused their businesses away from residential and more toward commercial carpet cleaning. One technician I know in Northern California has drifted away almost entirely from residential cleaning and now specializes in cleaning the carpets in medical locations.

Warner: Things are better, I agree, but still not as good as we would all like them to be. Many carpet cleaners have told me that the frequency of repeat business has slowed significantly. They still have many of the same customers, but instead of having their carpets cleaned every six months, they now have them cleaned once a year and even stretch that if they can. But I still know of technicians who are booked 18 months in advance. [Economic] downturns rarely affect everyone in the same way.

Other than focusing on commercial work, what other proactive steps have carpet cleaning technicians taken to adjust to their new business realities?

Warner: Without question, they have beefed up their marketing. A lot of technicians have made their vans into moving billboards. They are canvassing every neighborhood they work in, looking for new clients. Many are now using social media, some with a great deal of success. In fact, many technicians say their new marketing programs have been so effective, they are concerned they could have a new problem down the road: too many customers and not enough time or workers.

McKee: As manufacturers, we watch buying trends. We are seeing more technicians looking to get the biggest bang for their buck, whether it is a portable or truckmount extractor. They are asking more questions and want more specifics about the equipment they are interested in, and manufacturers and distributors have to have the answers. Ultimately, I think it is making carpet cleaning technicians far better equipment shoppers.

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