

## **Will the Economy Take the Glow out of Green?**

**By Mike Sawchuk**

At the upcoming ISSA tradeshow, there will be a lot of talk about new products and equipment being introduced as well as new trends in the industry, and again a bit of astonishment at how Green the jansan industry is getting. However, this year, unlike in many previous years, a new topic will be on just about everyone's mind: How is the economy going to impact jansan distributors? And more specifically, because our industry is now embracing Green so enthusiastically, will a dimming economy slow or end this, essentially taking the glow out of Green?

No one has a crystal ball, and it is true that some major "corrections," as economist like to call them, are in store for us all. Already, some industries, such as airlines, real estate, and auto manufacturers and dealers, are suffering quite a bit. However, the jansan industry tends to weather these storms in better shape than these and many others.

The reasons are many but actually rather simple. We serve all kinds of industries, from healthcare and education to auto dealerships and real estate companies. Although one may be going through hard times, another may feel no impact at all or may even be growing. For distributors, this means we must go where the "getting is still good" and focus on those industries that will be minimally impacted by the economy.

### **Green Specific**

Although most astute distributors will be able to comfortably ride out the downturn, this will be our first test of how well Green cleaning and the interest in environmentally preferable cleaning products will survive. Historically, Green cleaning advocates have noted that even though we are seeing more government regulations requiring the use of Green products, for the most part Green cleaning has been customer-driven. Because of this, many are now wondering if our customers who are being negatively impacted by the economy will decide now is *not* the time to go Green.

To better understand what is happening, and possibly what we can expect in the future, I submit the following based on my own experience with Green cleaning and working with distributors and end users all over North America for more than 15 years:

- For many facility managers, selecting conventional cleaning products is no longer an option. They have made a Green-only purchasing policy decision and will select a conventional cleaning product only if they cannot find a Green equivalent that works as well or if the only Green options are significantly more expensive. For the most part, this happens only when selecting environmentally preferable floorcare finishes, but there are now floor care finishes available that meet end-user demands as to application, performance, and durability.

Other facility managers have noticed a definite improvement in worker health, productivity, and morale. And in schools, student performance has improved once they have begun using Green cleaning products. In these cases, they are “sold on Green,” and there is no interest in going back to conventional products.

- We are seeing more and more government regulation requiring the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products in government and other facilities. This is especially happening with schools, where district after district has decided to select only Green cleaning products. This appears to be a trend that will continue to build.
- Many of our customers—building service contractors (BSCs) and other facility service providers—have used Green as a marketing tool and have found it beneficial. Several of the largest BSCs in North America are doing this, and many indicate they are transferring completely from conventional to Green cleaning systems.
- More and more janitorial manufacturers have come on board with Green product lines. They are putting more time, energy, resources, and marketing budgets into developing environmentally preferable cleaning products. Additionally, they

are marketing these products to end users, extolling the benefits of going Green.

- Costs for Green cleaning products are now comparable to conventional cleaning products in most categories. Even when there is an added charge, when the dilution ratios, other use factors, and benefits such as improved worker productivity or reduced absenteeism are considered, those added costs essentially evaporate.

One recent study found that incorporating Green cleaning and related practices helped improve worker productivity by 0.5 percent. Although that figure looks small, it translates into an annual productivity gain of more than \$30 billion.

- Finally, many end users have simply come to the conclusion that going Green is the right thing to do. They are becoming more environmentally responsible in other aspects of their building operations and find adopting Green cleaning to be one of the most beneficial and easiest building practices they can incorporate.

Although I am essentially optimistic about our industry and the further adoption of Green cleaning by end users, I admit we may see some difficulties ahead. However, these should be viewed as just temporary bumps on the road. It is important to take a long-range view and not just focus on current conditions. The trends are pretty clear: There is a lot of glow in Green in our future.

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