

Your Cart Style

Latest Bulk Carts Deliver Looks, Locks and Longevity

Your budget may be as tight as ever, but when it comes to investing in the latest bulk linen and laundry carts, you may find some support from an unlikely place: the marketing department. The function of this department is to project a consistent marketing message that creates value and justifies rising rates throughout the entire property. Many have finally recognized, after cringing at the sight of drab, bruised, gray carts rolling through the lobby or on the floor in full view of their guests, that housekeeping plays a key role in either leveraging that message or hindering its impact. More and more often they are willing to support investing resources in strengthening housekeeping's image as well as its efficiency.

In hotels, resorts, nursing homes, assisted living centers, healthcare facilities and other properties positioned as five-star, elite or deluxe where rates are typically above average and the quality and service are expected to be well above average, many executives are turning to housekeeping as the last opportunity to upgrade the image of the brand. From a look at the revenue potential for these luxury properties, it is easy to see why so

much attention and investment is being paid to the high end. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers' U.S. Lodging Forecast, revenue per available room (RevPAR) at luxury properties climbed 8.7 percent in 2004; the rate is expected to jump 5.7 percent this year and 6.2 percent in 2006, while occupancy rose 2.8 percent. Economy properties, by contrast, were at the lowest end of the scale. Similarly, entrance fees alone at elite continuing care centers targeting wealthy baby boomers with elderly parents can reach \$500,000.00.

With so many companies jockeying for a piece of the luxury market, competition is fierce and executives are scrambling to find new ways to differentiate their properties.

With the latest advances in bulk laundry trucks, Executive Housekeepers and marketers alike have a new weapon to tip the scales in their favor. Until recently, laundry cart manufacturers focused on function and longevity. Just moving linens to the floor and back without becoming a maintenance headache or an annual budget item was the primary goal. Few considered turning the staid laundry cart into a rolling marketing statement. But



now, manufacturers are introducing carts that not only deliver improved functionality and extra long life but also striking visual appeal. Smooth finishes on fully-enclosed carts, shapely profiles and a choice of nearly two dozen colors are standard amenities. Carts are also available in custom colors to match a Hilton blue, Marriott red or Hard Rock Hotel brown, for example, extending the brand's imagery and color scheme throughout the property. The cart color may be customized to match or coordinate with the interior décor as well, which not only enhances the overall look of the facility but also helps the carts blend into the hallway, lobby, banquet room or other area. While aging, dull carts often stick out like an eyesore on an otherwise immaculate guest floor, these new carts appear as a part of the surroundings, as if they were specified by the interior decorator. Similarly, new colored textures such as granite and sandstone

display a speckled, decidedly upscale look akin to the many granite countertops common to today's luxury homes. In addition to its soothing, natural tones, the stone-like colorations also break the line of vision in much the same way that ballroom carpet patterns are used to divert attention from the floor and any of its flaws or stains. In effect, when the cart is in full view, its color scheme can actually help divert attention towards the more decorative elements of the facility.

Yet for all the excitement over upgrades in aesthetics and visual appeal, these carts also offer a variety of functional improvements to promote maximum efficiency. A cart which has been recently introduced to the market, for example, is designed with a hinged split top and an advanced door design that promote operation as both a roundtrip and one-way clean linen delivery cart. Two wire or molded polyethylene shelves separate finished clean linens during delivery and afterward, they may be easily repositioned on the front of the cart to create a high-capacity return transport truck for soiled linen. In this position, the shelves permit ventilation inside the cart and also provide an internal barrier that prevents contact with the outer skin of the cart. To deter casual theft and prevent linens from falling out of the cart during over the road transport, the cart's doors come with built-in security locks. Plus, when the doors are opened, they retract completely and snap flush against the sides of the cart for maximum, ergonomic access to the

goods and to minimize the amount of space needed in the room or hallway. And when the top is closed as a protective roof, its oversized tray permits it to do triple duty as a guest supply cart. By packing ample linens, shampoos, soaps, coffee and other guest amenities into each trip, housekeepers may spend less time in the supply closets loading and unloading their carts. Further, by designing in looks, functionality, security and over-the-road durability, the versatility of the new cart makes it ideal for facilities managing the laundry operations for other area properties or for facilities with in-house laundry operations considering offering laundry services to other properties in the future.

With the adoption of rotational molded plastic as the primary material for today's bulk laundry carts, it's easy to forget how difficult it used to be to clean canvas, aluminum and other types of carts. Since the polyethylene construction's smooth finish wipes clean, ensuring the cleanliness of linens and anything else coming into contact with the cart is easy. And with automatic cart washing machines, it's even easier. However, most carts in the field are supported by wooden or metal bases, which rot or rust, respectively, over time. The newest carts feature 100 percent molded polyethylene bases, which are chemically immune to rust and rot yet can handle the same amount of weight. They also offer extra impact resistance to protect the cart from collisions with walls, curbs and

truck tailgates along with the added benefit of smooth edges to protect the walls and furniture. And these bases enable the carts to be rolled into automatic washers over and over again for years without fear of any deterioration. With a potential life expectancy of a dozen years or more and significantly less upkeep than their predecessors, these carts not only look great but they spend more time on the floor and less time in maintenance.

While much attention is lavished on the training and outfitting of front desk and administrative personnel and to the appearance of the lobby, it is important to consider that the housekeeping staff comes into more frequent contact with guests, residents and patients than many desk clerks and other personnel. Projecting a clean, professional image through housekeeping instills confidence in the cleanliness of the room, its linens and the facility and also projects added value in support of marketing. Sleek, clean-looking carts imply the facility and its leadership are committed to cleanliness from its linens to its rest room facilities and everywhere in between. This visual perception impacts the perceived value of the room or accommodation and helps justify increasingly high rates. The housekeeping department, by extending the value proposition throughout every facet of the entire guest experience, could finally be getting its due.

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