

Report on the Guild “Professional Cleaners” Scottish conference Sunday 4th September 2016

The billed theme was “Future Advancement” but after the speakers sessions a summarised outcome is “To survive you must engage modern methods, consider customers preference for perfume, and social media sells”.

It was a busy schedule with seven speakers, each at the top of their sector, who skilfully addressed an audience of dedicated professional cleaners willing to learn and engage with both supporting exhibitors and the chosen subjects on the conference programme. One hour before the conference the exhibitors welcomed delegate arrivals with morning coffee in the exhibition hall and this year enjoying more space between exhibit stands than usual which helped with negotiations before the opening of the conference room at 10.00am. The Guild President, Stuart Boyd FGCL, opened and welcomed delegates, speakers and exhibitors, and confidently set the scene for the busy day ahead and then Guild Council Chairman Ken Cupitt took over to chair the sessions for the day introducing each of the speakers.

The first of whom was Rob Dixon from Miele who very capably addressed the proposal that cleaners currently with a solvent cleaning system should consider the benefits of adding a professional wet cleaning machine plus tumble dryer, after all, he stated, most cleaners also take in washing or laundry services and have occasion to also wash items too soiled for dry cleaning. His proposal was that using a dedicated specialist machine would help avoid damage but would also cope with all of the laundry items being processed and could help supplement the site financial turnover with additional work, such as duvet cleaning and the soiled wedding dress where mud stained hem lines are easier to clean by the dedicated wet cleaning process. One of the advantages, he stated for wet cleaning, was the resulting perfumed smell and at the end of his presentation Ken Cupitt, from his privilege of the chair of the conference, asked if this was selling point, and appreciated by the buying public, why solvent cleaning did not have this feature added because in wet clean detergents this was not natural to have a perfume but an add on in the makeup of these detergents.

The second paper was Jon Beach from Dry Stream who addressed the proposal of “Getting the most out of an EPOS system” and within his presentation gave an example of one site gaining an additional £28,000 per year following the installation just by using the system to charge the accurate price for the item processed rather than just a generic price on a list. He went on to advise that used wisely a good EPOS system will offer at least four key benefits that will help and these include generating increased revenue, reducing costs, ability to offer an improved customer service, and to win customer loyalty. Explaining where this new revenue can come from he went on to say that while it’s essential to attract new business the most profitable revenue for any retailer comes from incremental business from existing customers therefore one of the key principles was to help users to maximise income from existing footfall. The additional revenue, he explained, is derived from existing customers visiting your shops and is free. Its incremental sales. There are no costs associated with bringing those customers in by way of advertising, promotion or PR. That’s because it comes from customers who are already YOUR customers and are probably already in YOUR shop. So, helping you generate increased revenue becomes “part of our mission statement and an EPOS system should help you do that fairly and consistently” he stated. Very quickly, he said, our customers started telling us how much additional revenue they were now generating with their new DryStream systems. However, the advantages did not just end here because users have access to

customer information that they can use to the marketing advantage of the business gaining more repeat business than dry cleaner sites using lesser methods of item marking. Once stored there is no need to re-enter the same detail for future visits of the same customer making the chore of taking in by the customer more pleasant, which was a theme visited many more times throughout the day by other speakers.

After a break for tea and coffee in the exhibition hall conference delegates returned to listen to Richard Cole from Cole and Wilson, now part of the Christeyns Group, and he followed his explanation of the changes by introducing the new solvent Hi Glo. He went on to inform that the new solvent was a blend and was best used with other additives from the Cole and Wilson range and in fact was superior at removal of water borne stains than any of the currently used solvents such as, perc, HCS, or siloxane D5. It was also gentle on dyes and was a perfect slot in solvent for a traditional hydrocarbon machine or use in a multi solvent machine. The new solvent was in fact odourless, as well as non-carcinogenic, and all results had been verified by the French Institute CTTN who specialise in textiles. Tests showed shrinkage to be as low as 0.5% even after 25 cleaning cycles and the use of Sultrasoft Hi cleaning enhancer boosts the removal of water borne stains as well as helping to keep the solvent in good condition and for the pre treatment of severe stains he recommended using their Sultrex Hi. He explained that extensive trials of Hi Glo had been carried out at the Moderna plant in Holland, which processes 6,000kgs of dry cleaning per week, and now processes all in the Hi Glo solvent, and that they have been totally perc solvent free since March 2014.

Five new solvents have been introduced in recent years and a second paper on this subject at the conference was the launch of a solvent named Sensene from Dow who also manufacture Pechloroethylene, in a joint paper given by Tobias Bertram from Dow and Marco Boccola from ILSA, the Italian dry cleaning machine manufacturer. This new addition is a formulation based upon modified alcohols and is also seen as a direct replacement for HCS, or for use in multisolvent machines and the overall cleaning performance is stated to be better compared to other regularly used solvents including perc and HCS. Especially on polyester Sensene has very good cleaning performance, with greying of fabrics equal to that of both perc and HCS, and had been first introduced at the Frankfurt exhibition in June and since then many installations throughout Europe have been converted, including in the UK. The best testimonial for the solvent appeared to be a Guild member who had her machine, in Glasgow, converted the previous day and was present at the conference to say the conversion was quick and trouble free and although early days she was pleased with the results so far. In a comparison chart it was revealed that the new solvent had a KB value of 162, compared to perc of 90, HCS of 27 and siloxane D5 of 13, and yet they said that it had no detrimental effects on garment adornments unlike those experienced with perchlorethylene. It was further stated that there would be four new conversions in the UK to the use of Sensene by the end of September 2016.

After a break for lunch and further viewing of the exhibitors the conference re-assembled for the first paper of the afternoon which was given by Jack de Montaignac, Chief Commercial Officer, from Laundrapp, an on line promotional company for laundry and dry cleaning services, who astonished delegates present by revealing that backers had invested £10 million into the business to enable it to grow, not only in the UK but throughout the world. Jack went on to say that the company mission statement was "To become the World's leading on-demand laundry and dry cleaning platform

through developing world class on-demand technology, mass market awareness and delighting our customers". He went on to explain that our industry was considered archaic, which was not entirely true but we are backward at adopting modern methods of digital marketing and Laundrapp was keen to change customer habits and behaviour with regard to our services, and was connecting cleaners direct to customers with smart digital technology, targeting and perhaps opening the market to a younger, digitally savvy audience. Laundrapp was to do this while maintaining exceptional customer services and bringing professional laundry and dry cleaning to the customer's door through regional partners and the basis was not chasing prices down but to negotiate a fair price for the service with each. He went on to explain that after taking a year to build the technology they officially launched Laundrapp on Jan 16th 2015 just over 18 months ago and already they have forty two vans in the London area alone, with a presence in 50 towns and cities, cleaning an item every ten seconds. They are now one of the UKs fastest growing start up businesses.

Having now had the appetite for digital technology wetted the next speaker was Leon Wennekes from CINET (professional textile care) based in Holland but representing Professional Textile Care throughout the world. Leon has a Masters degree in Business Administration and carries out market research in PTC and also does the marketing for CINET as well as the Dutch PTC associations and is a specialist in retail marketing for the professional textile care market . He introduced the conference to digital technology by saying there are three areas on the internet, Internet as a communication tool, Internet as a service platform, internet as a business card and he said platforms like Uber are also part of the third area but the main question is "what to do with it? (besides your busy schedules of delivering high quality cleaning) ". He explained when a marketing strategy is formulated and campaigns are executed, the focus should be easy understandable messages which the pre-determined customer segment (or part of the segment) can be instantly related to. Basically, he went on to say, describing a good marketing strategy or action comes down to five questions, What do I want to achieve? Who is my actual customer (segment)? Why would the customer choose me? How do I 'tune' my message? Where can I reach my customer? He answered his own questions by stating "The tricky part of the above questions is that there are different ways to answer them for each situation. Nevertheless ensuring that a marketing strategy has all of these aspects covers at least results in a well-thought over approach". He then stated "you can monitor exactly what does work well and what not by looking at the conversion rates in your analytics tool box. How many people have been reached? How many have clicked or visited your website or 'landing page'? How long did they stay on a website / landing page? How many orders where actually placed or how many visited your shop? Are these recurring customers? Did they order, or visit again? How many become monthly, or bi-weekly, weekly users? Upsell extra products to loyal customers - seasonal products for example. How many customers are actually talking about your product online or recommend it to others? Measuring and analysis, he explained are the key for digital marketing. Advising on company searching on line he explained about search engine optimization, which he said could become advanced therefore start with typing in key words on which your business should be found because that is the least you can do, but you have two options, you want to improve yourself, on Google or Youtube, or you need help, in which case find a local marketing expert to assist you, this doesn't have to be that expensive, he explained, if you start small and jointly set up realistic targets that can return your investment quickly!

Final paper of the day was from Brian Pearce a prominent Guild member who is also an international dry cleaning consultant with experience in setting up large dry cleaning concerns in many foreign

countries. Brian's talk was about "Quality enhancing a business prospects", and he described different dry cleaning businesses throughout the world and the different ways that many had adopted to help improve the customer experience of using our type of services. He went on to explain that those businesses with high expectations of quality standards also received the best paid prices from their customers but low prices actually left little room for providing a quality service and financial survival but he explained quality is not just a statement and must be carried out throughout the business or the customer will quickly realise and take their business elsewhere. Through pictorial examples he showed what could be achieved in enhancing the business and this could be with Good Housekeeping , perhaps smart uniforms for sales staff, by improving your customer relation skills, and by smarten up your reception area, making sure it smells fresh and welcoming. Most importantly avoiding a fluctuating standard, improve your stain removing skills, improving your presentation, and think about adding a collection and delivery service, or getting Guild Q Star qualifications. His most important message was to suggest that cleaners work to a standard, giving customers a "Fair Deal" and to consider an investment in a pro-active website. Brian then finished by explaining what he had in mind for his Fair deal Promise - "Handle all clothes, furnishings and other items accepted for processing with proper and due care and attention. Investigate any complaint promptly and if required to re-process free of charge any article which is considered unsatisfactory. Pay fair compensation for loss or damage due to negligence in accordance with the TSA Fair Claims Guide. To train all staff to be competent, courteous and helpful at all times. To keep shops, vans, containers and premises clean and tidy at all times. To maintain the highest possible standard of quality and service consistent with the price charged. To display in shop premises a list of prices for standard articles. To have all orders ready or delivered at the time stated, unless prevented by exceptional circumstances."

After a busy day of exceptional papers delegates had been left with much to think about and perhaps to return to in the coming months but it was remarkable that all had this enthusiasm for the future and all seemed to be willing to engage with new techniques and could see a bright future for those prepared to adapt and adopt.