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Technical Bulletins

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SIMPLIFYING FABRIC PROTECTORS AND THE BEST WAYS TO SELL THEM

SILICONES. FLUORO-CHEMICALS. SOLVENT PROTECTORS. SOLVENT FLUOROPROTECTORS. DU PONT. 3M®. COPOLYMER RESINS. DYE BLOCKERS. STAIN RESISTANT. STAIN REPELLANT. SOIL RESISTANT. FLUORO-CHEMICAL/ STAIN AND DYE BLOCKERS....

Confused yet? Don't feel alone. The myriad of confusion that surrounds fabric protectors seems to only get worse with the introduction of each new product by each new company. There is probably not a more debated topic in our industry than fabric protectors. Yet, the sales figures continue to show that relatively speaking, very little is being sold by independent professional carpet cleaners. A lot of talk, but not much action, one might say. One recent estimate is that a few franchise companies which represent only 8% of the total industry sell 80% of the fabric protectors that are being sold. What do "they" know or do that you don't know or do? Amongst many independent professional cleaners, the debate even rages on whether fabric protectors actually work or provide the carpet consumer with a true benefit. The time has come for some understanding, some answers, and some better ways to sell fabric protection.

Let's examine a little bit of background and history surrounding fabric protection. There has been a great deal of misunderstanding about how each of the different types of fabric protectors even work and what the differences and advantages are. Many cleaners have expected "pull-through" consumer advertising from a national company such as 3M® or Du Pont to sell the product for them. The truth is that the sales levels of the various fabric protectors do not justify the expense of national consumer advertising. There are obviously some exceptional companies that have been wildly successful at selling fabric protection. It is also true that there are some unscrupulous cleaners who have sold fabric protectors and applied not much more than water. Truth is though, that the majority of professional cleaners sell fabric protection on just a few jobs a month. They apply the chemical correctly and then move onto their next cleaning job.

The present opportunities and challenges that face the professional cleaner relating to fabric protectors are important to consider. There are so many different products. Some products claim to clean and protect in one step. Is that possible? Some companies offer warranties and guarantees. What exactly is it that they are "warranting" or guaranteeing? We need better ways to sell the products, no doubt. But we as independent cleaners need to make a commitment to becoming better sales people, too. We need to decide for ourselves once and for all whether these products work and what kind of benefit are they offering to the carpet consumer. I would challenge any professional cleaner to find out for him/herself whether or not the products they sell do what they say. Lay out a carpet in the garage or shop and apply them. You'll be pleasantly surprised. You'll find out that when you understand what the proper expectations are for each product, that most products do exactly what they say they'll do.

All of the more popular types of fabric protectors can be grouped into four categories:

- 1) Silicone/ Copolymer Resin Protectors - These are solvent carried silicone oils that provide a staining repellent against water based spills;
- 2) Water Carried Fluorochemicals - These are for water and oil based spill repellent, but are primarily designed for soil resistance;
- 3) Fluorochemical/Stain and Dye Blocking Treatments - These provide stain and dye blocking performance for carpeting similar to that of mill applied stain resistant protection. They also provide soil resistance; and
- 4) Solvent Carried Fluorochemicals - these provide soil and stain resistance for delicate natural fabrics such as wool or cotton.

What are the products that fit into these categories? What are the best ways to sell them? What kind of promotional materials are really needed? What are the advantages of each category of fabric protectors? What should be used on what? What can be used on what? Do some fabric protectors really harm carpeting? Do they really work? What can we learn from companies who sell fabric protection successfully? At this point, we seem to have more questions than answers.

Fortunately, new systems have been developed. New innovative products have been developed. Steam Way has developed, in conjunction with Du Pont, a one spray fluorochemical / stain and dye blocking treatment that can be used safely and effectively on both stain resistant and non-stain resistant carpet. One way to approach the selling of fabric protectors is to understand that your customers have different needs. That is why there are different products on the market. Most cleaning companies are making the mistake of "grouping" all fabric protectors into one category. Programs have been developed which allow you to sell fabric protection as a package. This allows the customer to choose which type of protection best fills their needs, choose a product that will not effect their warranty coverage on their carpet, and select a product which will fit into their budget. Steam Way has a full sales and marketing program for its fabric protection line called FabriCover®. Included in this program are a four color sales brochure, decals, arm patches, and an easy sales program. The FabriCover® product line includes products that fit into all four categories. They are sold as a package. Test marketing has demonstrated that if a cleaning company will simply make a commitment to handing out the sales brochure on every job, be prepared to answer questions, and simply ask for the order on every job, that a company can easily sell fabric protection on 40 to 60% of their cleaning jobs! Companies that make an even deeper commitment to training their technicians as a sales force and rewarding them for success have achieved up to an 80% sales rate. No high pressure sales. The customer is not sold something that they don't want or need. That is part of the beauty of sales packages, by their design they reduce the feeling of pressure, because your customer always has choices. Included in an innovative sales approach to selling fabric protection should be a recommendation chart that allows your customer and your sales force to easily see which of the four products will fit the customer's needs best. This should include a description of their carpeting type and the soiling conditions that these carpets are subject to. You can use this program or create your own. Most cleaning companies already have more than one product in stock. Let the differences in each product help sell each other. By allowing each products' features and benefits to be explained, you can eliminate unrealistic expectations on each product.

It all starts with a commitment to try. If you are reading this article and convinced your company can not sell more fabric protection, it is most likely that you will achieve this "self-fulfilling prophesy", because you simply will not leave enough time on each job to try. The companies that make a commitment to trying a new type of sales effort will join that 8% of the industry that is selling lots of fabric protection. It begins with a commitment and an understanding. Hopefully, I've helped with the understanding. Now it is up to you to make the commitment.

About the author:

R. Doyle Bloss is the Chief Executive Officer for Steam Way International in Denver, Colorado. Always thought provoking and helpful, he is a regular speaker at industry conventions, has authored several books, and has designed several marketing programs for the cleaning and restoration industry. Steam Way has just completed the development of the most innovative program ever developed for selling fabric protection. You can learn more about Steam Way and fabric protectors by calling them at 1-800-447-8326.