

LaundryLogic

By Jeff Gardner, President of The Laundry Doctor

WDF 101: Back To Basics

Here's What To Consider Before Launching Your Wash-Dry-Fold Service



I've been receiving a lot of phone calls lately from new operators just getting into the industry – many with questions about offering a wash-dry-fold service. As a result, I thought now would be a perfect time to revisit this segment of the business and dust off some of the main principles of getting started and running a profitable wash-dry-fold operation.

For drycleaners, the path toward getting into the wash-dry-fold business is simple and straightforward. Just put up a sign and open your doors to this type of business – making sure, of course, that your staff is trained in processing laundry and that you have ample space dedicated to these accounts; updating your website to reflect this additional service; and perhaps even running some Google ads. Basically, market your new offering online and in your store.

A more simple first step could be finding a few light-duty commercial accounts. Unlike with traditional residential wash-dry-fold laundry, you can count commercial accounts to be there every week – you can plan your labor around them and grow your full-service business that way.

With adding a full-service product, you're either going to

need to go out and sell it to commercial customers, or wait for it to grow based on your quality and marketplace factors.

It's important to understand that residential wash-dry-fold isn't a service that people need; it's one that they want. So, you're going to build that business based on being available with a quality service when a customer has a desire for it. By contrast, a commercial laundry [or drycleaning] account is something people need, so it's something you can actively sell to them.

In other words, wash-dry-fold is a product for those who either greatly value their time or simply don't have enough of it to do their own laundry. Looking at it from this point of view may help you to best market your new service.

The next step to starting a thriving wash-dry-fold business is developing some clear-cut standards of what to do and how to do it.

For instance, you need to come up with a pricing schedule. Clearly, your costs will factor into what you charge. I recommend keeping your wash-dry-fold costs in the 30 percent to 35 percent range. And, yes, that figure does include labor, which is something many business owners fail to consider – especially when they're using employees who are already on the payroll.

Another key factor is the need to have definitive systems in place. Let's say you have a system where you take in wash-dry-fold orders all day, and then the next morning your employees gets it all done during the early part of the day, when your store isn't as busy. This way, your evening employees aren't bothered with wash-dry-fold orders; they're focused on taking care of your regular customers.

That seems like a sensible system. However, to make it work, you have to develop a way to track those various wash-dry-fold orders. Just like in drycleaning, orders must



be tracked. Whose clothes are in which machine? What belongs to whom? Perhaps the biggest challenge you'll face when doing wash-dry-fold laundry is ensuring that you don't mix up customers' orders or misplace their garments.

There are a couple of different ways to keep track of your wash-dry-fold orders. The first method is to invest in a product, which enables you to wash an entire load in cold or lukewarm water. Since you're not separating lights and darks, you've lessened the chance of accidentally mixing up different customers' garments or misplacing them. It's also a good way to save a little bit on utility costs because you're combining those loads.

With that said, most operators separate lights and darks, and wash them in warm to cold water. Personally, at my laundry, we use hot water for whites only, because hot water presents too much of a risk of bleeding colors from one garment to another.

When just getting started with wash-dry-fold, a good method for tracking your orders throughout the process is by using a simple three-part tag, which you can purchase from most supply companies. These tags typically feature a white, a yellow, and a pink sheet. You can write down the customer's name, phone number, the time and date he or she wants the order back, and when the order arrived. Traditionally, we've put the white slip on

the order when finished. We give the customer the pink slip as a claim check. And we use the yellow slip while processing the order.

We would write down the washers and the dryers, and have the yellow slip follow the order – so we can keep track of what washer and dryer the order is in, and we can always refer to that slip when we assemble the finished order. Then, we would attach the white slip to the final product.

As your wash-dry-fold service grows, I strongly suggest upgrading to a point-of-sale system. Once you've advanced to this stage, many of today's POS systems offer printable wash-dry-fold tracking slips, or they will allow you to print multiple receipts so that you can actually place one receipt on each machine, and those receipts can transfer to the dryers – that way you know exactly what's in each machine because the receipt for a particular order is on the machine. Again, a POS system is the best method, but while you're still growing your full-service operation, a basic, handwritten three-part slip system will work just fine.

Once you've washed and dried the garments, it's time to fold them. And you need to decide exactly how you want your staff to fold your customers' clothes. Consistency counts. And we'll discuss this in detail in our next installment.

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