

Why 2020 is the time for automation



By Murray McDonald

The end of the year is near. We at Duplex have worked strongly in 2019 to implement change – from researching the market to conducting trials, particularly in automation technology – to gauge how ready the market is for the shift. Why should it happen in 2020?

THE RISING PROBLEM

You might have heard this: manual handling is the main source of most common injuries to housekeepers such as lower back pain and every other associated injuries.

As much as advanced technology attempts to control and reduce these risks, it is a further challenge for us to transform the system.

We have spoken to some of our customers in accommodation and retail facilities that have raised various facility cleaning challenges ranging from operation management, time-efficiency, to quality management systems.

Just within the Melbourne CBD itself, most employees only spend 15-20 minutes to clean an average of 120m² space daily with a broom, mop and bucket in two sequences: sweeping and then mopping. Most of them have been shown to miss these key points:

- They do not sweep under benches
- They missed hard to reach corners
- They do not regularly clean ceilings
- They do not change their water bucket frequently
- They do daily cleaning for the sake of doing it

While the industry has given clear evidence that future hotel guests will predominantly be harder to win over, with Australia's tourism sector growing extensively over the next three years; their own plans to cope with it seem to be less progressive and projected to create a wider gap between traveller actions and industry reactions.

The industry could transform their management systems in order to create a level playing field – including cleaning and hygiene.

A FRIENDLIER CHOICE

You may have used steam technology previously and are aware of the virtues. Although enforcing the shift to chemical free cleaning in the retail and hospitality industries may seem to be a daunting task, many in the kitchen have slowly adapted to steam vapour and microfiber mitts with a little help from detergent in efficient kitchen cleaning.

The use of detergent is somewhat less important to them, yet psychologically appeases the cleaning process. In 2020, we should be able to completely remove chemicals, saving our budget, and respecting the environment.

Automation, although many of us can see it often applied in Europe and the United States, has not yet gained much popularity here in Australia. We were perhaps too early to the market but that is quickly turning around as we approach 2020.

A recent market trial has proven our point. Today a fleet of intelligent cleaners in corridors of a renowned accommodation facility in Melbourne are cleaning during low traffic times at midnight.

While these co-bots can automatically clean areas by themselves, cleaners have the option to be home at midnight and focus on more complex environment during the day. They should no longer be doing dull and repetitive tasks each day, and be able to focus more on other tasks that would serve customers' experiences.

The more we automate, the more possibility for us to improve human productivity as well as focusing ourselves in more important tasks. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), cognitive technologies and robotics to augment work is allowing the jobs today to become more data-driven with better skills in problem-solving, communication, interpretation and design.

A Deloitte study has shown humans should focus more on their cognitive skills instead of manual skills. Superjobs are to be created and will require better skills in problem-solving, communication, interpretation, and design.

With the rising demand from travellers, next year is really the time for the retail and hospitality industries to improve the skills of their workforce.

Robots, according to our trial, are capable of cleaning 100 per cent of an area without missing a speck of dust, as well as accessing difficult corners that humans can't reach with normal vacuum cleaners. The robots can do four hours worth of labour within just one hour.

IMPROVEMENT AND CONSISTENCY ON QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY

The best thing about AI is that the entire system is data-driven, through remote monitoring and connected technology. Management can easily see the cleaning progress in real time or view the robots' route logs from any devices, being able to validate cleaning in a very efficient manner.

Maps of rooms and buildings can be updated in real time, displaying detailed day-to-day planning of cleaning activities, ensuring jobs are done and performance is measurable. It is time to improve the quality and manage consistency, as automation technology does not need to get out of routine or celebrate Christmas like humans!

Murray McDonald is a director of Duplex Cleaning Machines Australia. ■

“With the rising demand from travellers, next year is really the time for the retail and hospitality industries to improve the skills of their workforce.”