

Providing Responsible Industry Leadership

Advocating for issues that matter to our customers



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By Kristin Dempsey



Based in Jessup, PA, Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply serves seven Mid-Atlantic states. The company has been listed as one of the “Top 40 Fastest Growing Businesses” in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and it’s twice been named as one of the best places to work in Pennsylvania.

Since its founding in 1959 by my father, Patrick Dempsey and my uncle, Richard Dempsey, Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply, Jessup, PA, has always aspired to provide responsible leadership to the textile services industry as well as to the industries of the customers we serve, including food services, healthcare, manufacturing, automotive, hotels and casinos, contractors, grocery and financial. Growing our own business is synergistic with the success of our customers and their industries. So, just as we at Dempsey are investing in advanced technologies and business practices, we also reach out to help our customers operate in socially responsible ways, control their costs and enhance the services they provide.

Last year, our decision to integrate a business-to-business public relations program into our marketing mix was based on achieving dual goals of continuing our own business growth and development, while also honoring our corporate history of responsible industry leadership in areas such as environmental stewardship, industry safety issues, cooperative marketing

arrangements, innovative technologies and cost-saving efficiencies.

ADVOCATING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Our mission is to advocate for the issues that matter to our customers. For instance, the greening of the supply chain is a megatrend for many companies and is in sync with Dempsey’s commitment to a sustainable future through conservation of the earth’s natural resources.

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As the first company to achieve certification in TRSA’s Clean Green certification program, our responsibility is to reduce the direct and indirect environmental impact of our company and our industry through leadership by example, recycling textiles and conserving resources. Our public relations program is helping us fulfill that responsibility in two important ways. First, by working collaboratively with TRSA to extend and support its messages; secondly, by actively promoting those messages—especially efficiencies in water and energy conservation and reusing, reclaiming and recycling resources—directly to our customers

and through their own industry-specific media and organizations.

Customer and industry education is a key initiative of our public relations program. PR as a communications medium uniquely allows us to present a reasoned, in-depth rationale (researched and confirmed by TRSA and other organizations) to make a compelling case for environmental solutions on industry issues such as: rented cloth cleaning towels vs. paper towels, which generate four times more solid waste than cloth towels. One rented wet mop equals 36 disposables; one rental dry mop equals 186 disposables. Paper examination gowns generate almost four times more solid waste than cloth. If one doctor gowns 20 patients per day for one year, it generates a half ton of garbage. Disposable mats generate nine times more landfill waste than rental mats; one rental equals 10 disposable mats. Paper wipers generate from 4-10 times more solid waste than cloth shop towels (depending on the soil of the job).

We can also address why using an industrial laundry process is much better for the environment than washing and drying items in smaller loads at home or on an unregulated business site where untreated wastewater is discharged to the local sanitary sewer system. And we can back up our argument with scientific studies: one study looked at the home laundering of uniforms vs. industrial laundering and found that home laundering uses 2.8 times more water and two times more energy than industrial laundering, wasting literally millions of gallons of water annually.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Active involvement in industry organizations and associations is key to “walking the PR walk.” Associations provide us with the mechanism to reach out to our fellow members, not just at the top tier, but penetrating all the way down to the end user and/or decision maker in the vendor-purchasing department. Our President, PJ Dempsey, chaired the TRSA Environmental Committee, which drives industry involvement in Laundry ESP® (Environmental Stewardship Program) and sustainable

laundering practices. Mark Lewis (corporate sales manager) has served as chairman of the Clean Green Task Force of TRSA, creating an educational DVD and publishing articles on the topic. Both Dempsey and Lewis have spoken before audiences of TRSA members nationwide on the benefits and methodologies of Clean Green improvements, education and marketing. The Clean Green DVD was shown as part of an MBA study and thesis program at Pepperdine University, helping to further educate college students on the industrial impact of clean and green processes.

In December 2010, Dempsey joined the Environmental Protection Agency’s Sustainability Partnership Program, a Region 3 initiative, to facilitate environmental sustainability at major organizations in the Mid-Atlantic through a collaborative effort. By sharing expertise in programs such as WaterSense, Energy Star and WasteWise, etc., Dempsey can help produce significant results in the reduction of waste generation, natural resource usage and energy consumption. These efforts not only help our customers reduce their environmental impact, they often lower their costs as well!



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- Accurate dispensing systems
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Dempsey also is a founding member of Laundry ESP, the textile services industry's voluntary environmental program, which the EPA has praised for its success in protecting the environment. Results include the reduction of wastewater pollutants (40%), the substitution of environmentally friendly wash chemicals the reduction of water (12.6%) and energy usage (11%) in laundering.

For our food services customers, we want to utilize our PR program to help educate restaurant managers and chefs about our Clean Green Certification, which will help earn *them* points toward green certifications in their own industry. We are developing articles for placement in food service trade publications to help spread the word about Clean Green and other broad-based industry environmental programs (such as the EPA's recommendations that restaurants utilize "reusable utensils, dinnerware, napkins and placemats" as a key tactic for source reduction), while also promoting our own products and services that support environmental and safety concerns. These include our React Automated Towel Dispenser to reduce the risk of cross-contamination; Snap/Pocket less Shirts to help keep foreign objects out of food; antimicrobial floor mats that inhibit the growth of bacteria and barcoded linen bags that allow us to bring back their valuable silverware and supplies.

PROMOTING SAFETY

Safety in the workplace is always top of mind in Dempsey plants, and we are proactive in updating our customers and employees on the need for safety procedures in all operating conditions. An important component of our communications program is to share Dempsey's workplace safety practices as well as best business practices with our own and our customer's industries. As with our green promotional efforts, we believe that public advocacy about safety issues benefits us all. For example, the textile services industry has external competitors, like paper products and on-premise laundering, but commercial laundering conserves vital natural resources, so we are not just tooting our own horn when we actively promote our industry's responsible practices to our customers.

We will implement similar PR programs to other industry markets we serve, for instance the growing oil and gas industry in Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale region. We want to bring the information to them, so that they don't have to hunt down local suppliers of flame-resistant (FR) uniforms or high-visibility garments for compliance with electrical safety and visibility regulations, which is time-consuming. It's a challenge for them to identify suppliers that understand

both their employee safety and comfort issues, but we can assist them in that regard through their trade media as well as via direct contact.

We help our customers in manufacturing, automotive, food service and other industries create a clean, safe work environment by promoting the use of antifatigue floor mats, dust mops, shop towels and restroom services. Safety message floor mats keep safety top of mind as the message changes weekly. Lottery message floor mats promote lottery sales and guide customers to the ticket line. Soy-based Industrial hand cleaners clean effectively without drying out skin.

FOSTERING OUTREACH & STRATEGIC PARTNERING

Since uniforms are among our core products, we paid particular attention when a study conducted by J.D Power & Associates found that consumers felt that the quality of a product or service was higher when workers were uniformed. We are passing that information along to our customers not just to enhance our own business, but to help them improve their business practices in order to gain an advantage for their firm with a uniform program customized to their image. In the restaurant and grocery industries, a chef coat and check pants on staff in the prepared foods area creates a café atmosphere. Colored aprons make it easy to identify staff in different departments. Table linens in a variety of colors create seasonal point of purchase displays in bakeries and prepared foods centers.

In the area of our own best practices, public relations allows us to credibly develop outreach programs that identify strategic partnering opportunities through affiliated organizations. We want our small business customers to know that Dempsey is a local, independent business too. PR helps us spread the message of our community support and involvement. We make donations because we believe in them, but PR helps us highlight good causes and Dempsey's involvement.

As my PR team at Einstein Marketing Group has pointed out, a comprehensive marketing program utilizes a variety of tactics interwoven to achieve synergy as we create and grow brand awareness. Our public relations agency is working in concert with our in-house marketing team to make sure that we are on message, and that our public relations efforts are pulled through to our sales team. We are working to help promote our customers and the new businesses they launch and to promote our services at the same time. Customers have welcomed our efforts to promote their success. **TS**