

Laundry Rooms Can Be Customized To Meet Residents' Needs

By Vicki Chesler, Highpoint Ventures, Inc.



The owners at Steven Ames' Upper West Side co-op were unhappy with their laundry room. There was always a wait for the dryers, the machines weren't clean, and their laundry company didn't respond quickly to service calls. But thanks to a determined effort of research, bid analysis and contract negotiation, they have a brand new laundry room that meets all their needs.

"About a year before our contract was up, we started doing research, established a laundry committee, and narrowed the search down to three mid-sized firms," says Steven, who is Vice President of the Co-op Board. "The first two gave us standard proposals, basically replacing the machines we had in the laundry room. But the third company, SDi Laundry Solutions, took a different approach: they said, well, let's look at your issues and your usage. They saw right away that we had a problem with our washer/dryer ratio: our dryer capacity was half that of our washer capacity, and that's why we had frustrated residents with laundry baskets filled with wet clothes waiting for dryers."

The laundry committee at Ames' 260-unit co-op decided to hire SDi, the company that took the creative, problem-solving approach, and the residents have been happy ever since.

"They determined that we needed more large washers that had extra wash and rinse cycles so our residents had a tiered approach—if they wanted to put more time on the machines, they could," says Ames. Electricity and venting issues that had caused problems for years were also addressed. A new folding area was added, and the extra dryers were stacked to fit them into the existing space.

"Our residents use the machines much more often now, and there is never a wait for machines. The service is excellent; the conversion was completed earlier than expected, went 'live' earlier than planned, and the transition was very simple," says Ames.

Creative problem-solving was also used to address the issue of soap build-up in the machines. The washers were programmed to run themselves at 4:30 every morning to clean out soap residue and other messy build-up. In addition, they made the room more pleasant as well as more energy efficient.

Robert Blum is on the Board of his Upper East Side co-op, which had a similar experience when they decided to have SDi redo their laundry room. Says Blum, "The residents are extremely happy with our new, high-quality machines and our renovated laundry room. While doing laundry is a chore, it is much more pleasant in a well-lit, clean space."

Using Smart Cards instead of cash or coins also makes a big difference. Residents have the option of adding value to their Smart Cards online or in the laundry room, or using a credit or debit card. Thus there is no risk of vandalism, and no need for anyone to come around collecting money. It's all done electronically. The resulting income is a welcome budget item for the building, and the convenience and satisfaction in having a well-run laundry room on site is a great amenity for residents, whether your building has four units or 400 units.



Stephen Ames, Vice President of his Upper West Side co-op, helped research and hire a new company to make major improvements in the building's laundry room.

"The laundry room is a convenience that adds value to the building," says Blum, adding, "the laundry room certainly assists us in our budgeting process, as funds go towards the building."

When it comes to service, not all laundry companies are equal. "We've had machines sit unusable for weeks on end," says one East Side Condo Board President. "We've been very dissatisfied with the service and will be sure to switch companies when our contract is up. Unfortunately we got locked into a contract that we can't get out of for quite some time."

Be sure to get references when considering a laundry company, and speak to other customers about their experience. Does the company offer live customer service representatives on the phone? Are they available 24/7? How quickly do they respond? How easy is it to make a service request?

And be sure to ask whether the company has delivered on its promises of paying a monthly fee to the building. Some contracts promise a set monthly fee while others offer a percentage of the revenue generated by the machines. But if there are frequent breakdowns that last for days—or even weeks—that will cut into the income your laundry room can generate, and thus will hurt your building's bottom line.

Board should always be sure to speak to several laundry companies when considering a new laundry room or an upgrade to an existing one. Ron Garfunkel, President and CEO of SDi Laundry Solutions, cautions boards, "Be careful of certain clauses in the contracts, such as automatic renewal, service response, and determination of monthly payment. And make sure the laundry company's proposal addresses any problems or issues that your residents are currently experiencing so you can hire the best company to solve those problems for you." It's wise to have your building's attorney look over any contracts before you commit.

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