



Business as Usual



This Site Industry Sites

SEARCH

Floor Care | Carpet Care | Restroom Care | Green Cleaning | Hand Tools | Chemicals/Cleaners | Exterior Care | Technology | Business Improvement | Legal/Regulatory | More

**MAGAZINES**

Sanitary Maintenance  
Contracting Profits  
Housekeeping Solutions

**DEPARTMENTS**

News of Interest  
People & Company Updates  
Calendar

**INFORMATION RESOURCES**

Management Minute  
CleanTips  
Buyer's Guide  
Case Studies/ White Papers  
Industry Statistics  
Industry Links  
CEOs on Sustainability

**PRODUCT RESOURCES**

Product Watch  
Top Products  
Storefronts

**BLOGS**

Distributor  
BSC  
In-house

**ABOUT**

About Us  
Contact Us  
Advertise  
Subscribe  
Site Map  
Policies

# SANITARY MAINTENANCE



September 20 08 | Request SM | Contact | Advertise | Reprints | Archives | Current issue |

UP CLOSE

## Microfiber: After A Slow Start, Sales Are Picking Up

*Product benefits and hands-on demonstrations help break down end user resistance*

By Cynthia Kincaid  
Email the SM editors

In the past few years, interest in microfiber has soared as many industries look for ways to improve productivity and contain costs around cleaning and sanitation. Jan/san distributors who sell microfiber say sales are starting to take off — but only for those who know how to properly tout the product's many benefits and advantages.

Microfiber, a synthetic fiber, was first invented in Sweden in the mid-1980s. Composed mainly of polyester and microfiber polymer, the strands create a positive electric charge, which almost magically captures dirt and debris. Once the material is washed, the electric charge is momentarily disrupted, releasing the dirt.

"I think microfiber is one of the most revolutionary products in our industry," says Chris Pratt, sales manager with Middletown, N.Y.-based E.A. Morse & Co. "The performance level is amazing."

Not only can microfiber pick up dirt and debris better than standard mops and cloths, it removes bacteria on surfaces, can be used with or without chemical treatments, and can be washed hundreds of times before having to be replaced.

"Microfiber absorbs 15 times its weight in water and reduces cross-contamination," says Belinda Jefferson, president of Detroit-based Hercules & Hercules Inc. "Because you're not contaminating your chemical or water, you don't need to change it. You can use that same chemical solution your entire shift because you're always putting in a clean mop to go to the next room."

The opportunity to launder microfiber over and over again, while still maintaining its effectiveness, is a real selling point to customers, says David Renard, president of Renard Paper Co., Inc., St. Louis.

"Microfiber can be washed 50, 100, 150 times, depending on how it was originally used, so there's a real cost savings and more longevity to [the products]," he says.

Microfiber also offers ergonomic advantages to end users.

"A lot of housekeepers now are foreign nationals, and they are smaller people," says Jefferson. "There's a tremendous amount of worker fatigue [in mopping] because a regular mop and bucket weighs about 10 pounds. The microfiber mop weighs less than a pound."

RDA Advantage Redistributors follow through every day, on every order.

Broad bundle of Food Service & Jan/San products

**RDA advantage**

Click here to find a Redistributor near you.

**Geerpres... the equipment of choice**

**GPS™ 2000 Microfiber Applicator**  
Self contained cleaning system dispenses uncontaminated fluid for every cleaning task.

**GEERPRES®**

**READ MORE:**

**CleanLink Articles:** microfiber

**Related Topics:** Microfiber

**Industry Articles:** microfiber

Still, despite its revolutionary advantages in cleaning and cost savings, microfiber has been slow to catch on.

"When microfiber first came out, I thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread," says Jefferson. "But it's taken three years to take off."

Most attribute this reluctance to both the resistance to change and the initial cost investment of switching to a microfiber system. Educating end users as to microfiber's reduced need for water and chemical treatments, plus the savings in time and labor, can add up to what Jefferson refers to as "a domino effect in terms of cost containment."

#### Keeping The End User In Mind

Healthcare has been the first market to truly embrace microfiber, with education slowly following behind. Restaurants and cruise ships may follow, although they have also been slow to respond.

"Property management companies are using microfiber now, and schools are finally getting into them because microfiber has developed into standard wet mops," says Pratt. "That's always been an issue because flat mops in schools just don't work too well."

In terms of product best sellers, Pratt says microfiber cloths sold in packs of 12 are E.A. Morse's top movers. Dust mops and wet mops are sold individually. Wet and dry mops are Renard's biggest sellers, which he sells as a dozen to a package.

Rather than sell individual units, Jefferson prefers to sell an entire microfiber system. She also emphasizes selling cloths and mitts for customers who have stairways, rails and ledges.

#### Overcoming Challenges

Despite its many advantages, distributors of microfiber do acknowledge some of its drawbacks, which is mainly the initial cost to start or switch to the new system.

"I was [recently] talking to a healthcare facility that we've been working on for two years, and they have finally agreed to buy the microfiber cart," says Jefferson. "They are going to implement the mopping system in their next budget within the next three to four months. It's a long process, and a lot of it is because of the initial costs."

While Renard agrees that overcoming a customer's initial cost objection can be challenging, he tries to illustrate how the ability to rewash microfiber hundreds of times will more than pay for itself over time.

"There is an expense factor to it," he says, "but microfiber rags can be rewashed many times, as opposed to the old rag from a rag company that may have impurities."

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in selling microfiber to customers is, surprisingly, its own cleaning.

"Laundry is the greatest complaint I have," says Jefferson.

Because of its synthetic nature, drying microfiber on too high a heat can cause the material to melt.

"Some healthcare facilities have purchased washers and dryers, and then have a housekeeper throw them in," says Jefferson.

Renard also tells his microfiber customers that they can line dry their cloths and mops, which will leave them just as clean and effective.

#### Highlighting Applications

With the variety of mops, dust mops and cloths available, the use for microfiber is almost endless. From floors, walls, countertops, large and small spaces, to wet or dry, chances are there is a microfiber product that can do the job. And because the water doesn't need to be changed frequently, or chemical treatment used at all, distributors can emphasize how end users can clean more thoroughly and efficiently.

"With a microfiber system, you're using the same disinfectant and water," says Renard. "They

clean, change the mop, and then go to the next room. They're using a fresh mop in the same water, which hasn't been contaminated."

This reduction in contamination can be a big selling point, especially to those cleaning healthcare or education facilities.

"With the old cleaning products, we were just moving the germs around," says Jefferson. "Microfiber takes them up and removes them."

The first time Pratt used microfiber, he says he could see the potential in applications because of its versatility and effectiveness, something he stresses to all his potential end users.

"I couldn't believe how much dirt it released when I rinsed it out," he says. "That's the beauty of microfiber. It holds a lot, and then it releases a lot once it's washed out in water."

Microfiber is so versatile that Jefferson even convinced a local casino to use microfiber cloths to clean its textured glass.

#### The Demo's The Thing

Just about everyone who sells microfiber products underscores the significance of demonstration as the only way to effectively sell to end users.

"We've asked all of our reps to take mops out and to demonstrate them because it's the best way to sell them," says Pratt. "You've got to put them in the hands of the end users."

For example, Pratt has a school's custodian crew dust mop the gymnasium floor with their standard dust mops. Then a sales rep follows up with a microfiber mop.

"It's amazing how much more debris we pick up, and because you don't have to use treatment, there are no slip issues," he says.

Microfiber has to be explained and demoed to the customer, says Renard.

"You really have to get out there and explain to the customer why it's beneficial for them to use it, especially in a healthcare situation," he says. "You have to let them do the hands-on."

Letting end users experience microfiber firsthand can go a long way toward breaking down the resistance to change.

"Some housekeepers can be a little more resistant, and when they see the ease of transition, they finally jump on board," says Jefferson.

Introducing end users to a microfiber system can help future sales.

"Let them use what they want to use, but always introduce the entire system, so that they know there is more than one application that can be utilized," says Jefferson.

Ultimately, by educating end users about the reduction in cross-contamination, ease of use, and cost containment, distributors can help end users come to understand why microfiber can be a good evolutionary cleaning choice.

"You've got to get them to understand that the microfiber technology is not just another mopping mechanism," says Jefferson. "This is a whole new technology for cleaning." M SM

*Cynthia Kincaid is a freelance writer in Portland, Ore.*