

## **Helping Hotels Dress for Success**

### *Cintas onsite wardrobe room services reduce costs, enhance operations*

Most hoteliers understand the need for their associates to maintain a good appearance. It's one of the first factors that can impact a guest's impression the minute they step onto a property. However, the components that go into helping associates maintain a good appearance can often be neglected. Once the initial apparel design is selected and the investment is made, many managers give little thought to how to protect their investment and keep uniforms looking sharp.

The issue goes beyond appearance. Poorly run wardrobe rooms can also be a potential money pit for hotels. Outdated inventory management systems, inefficient processing methods, untrained personnel and poorly designed spaces can result in frustrated employees and lost operational costs.

Regardless of its size, hotels that are concerned with the image of its employees are outsourcing their wardrobe rooms to control costs associated with inventory and labor. This white paper will show how three different sized hotels faced several unique issues with their wardrobe rooms. It will detail how each hotel was able to alleviate costly headaches associated with non-existent, poorly organized or mismanaged wardrobe room operation models by working with their uniform supplier, Cintas, to seamlessly integrate technology and expertise into the organization.

### **What is a Wardrobe Room and How Should It Work?**

Regardless of whether a staff member works at the front desk, in food and beverage or the housekeeping department, almost every hotel employee or associate wears a uniform. Upon accepting employment, each associate is generally given three uniforms to rotate throughout the week and wear during their shift.

Many mid-scale and high-end hotels provide onsite services to keep uniforms cleaned and maintained to ensure associates look their best. An area is designated as the wardrobe room, so when an associate checks into work for the day, he or she simply swipes their identification card to pick up the uniform. Each associate is designated a particular number which is read by the scanner. This tells the wardrobe room attendant the particular slot location of the uniform. Much like a dry cleaning operation, the attendant goes to the carousel and identifies the appropriate garment. The garment is then scanned using a bar-coded reader before being checked out to the associate.

At the end of the day, associates return soiled garments to the attendant. The uniform is scanned before being sent to the cleaner for laundering. When items return from the cleaner, each garment is inspected for missing buttons and tears. It is then reconciled against the order, scanned and returned to the appropriate position. As a result of this scanning technology and systematic procedure, each piece of the uniform can be easily tracked and its location identified at any point. If an associate has checked out all three of their uniforms without returning any pieces, the system will record this.

To maintain optimal control over uniform inventory, the wardrobe room director must work closely with human resources to identify new hires and associates who are no longer with the company. When an associate stops working for the hotel, human resources can immediately call the wardrobe room attendant to find out how many garments that associate should return before collecting the final paycheck.

On a monthly basis, wardrobe room directors should supply the appropriate hotel managers with information on inventory and supply by size and style. These costs can be broken down by department so management can clearly identify the potential expenses and/or savings compared against budgeted costs. These reports help alleviate any potential surprises if an order needs to be made.

Like any department in a hotel, a wardrobe room must be run by a professional who has been properly trained and knows what they are doing. It must be updated with new technology to streamline operations and track garments. The director must be able to provide updated inventory and budget reports while working closely with other departments in the hotel to understand specific issues that may impact the number of associates, such as seasonal demands. He or she must also be able to work with local cleaners along with the uniform supplier to ensure associates have garments that keep them looking their best.

Hotels that make an initial investment in the appearance of their employees must also make an investment maintaining that appearance. It is a decision that ultimately improves any bottom line.

However, many hoteliers such as the Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans, Westin Kierland in Scottsdale and Marriott World Center Orlando realized that running a wardrobe room was not their core competency. In many instances, managing the operations with in-house staff and resources took away from not only the appearance of the employees but also the service they provided their guests. Listed below are several common issues hotels experience with internally managed wardrobe rooms and how Cintas' onsite wardrobe room solutions have been able to resolve each problem.

### **ISSUE: Staffing the Wardrobe Room with Employees from Different Departments**

For many organizations, the wardrobe room is an afterthought. In some hotels, a housekeeping or laundry manager oversees the operations and staffs it with individuals from that department. While associates are cross-trained to work in the wardrobe room, they lack the expertise to understand all facets of the operation. As a result, pieces may be lost, inaccurate orders are placed and there is confusion with local dry cleaners and launderers.

This was the case at the Marriott Orlando World Center. For more than 20 years, the room was run by the manager of the laundry department and staffed by eight associates

who were dedicated to the wardrobe room. However, if there were staffing shortages, associates were pulled from the laundry department to attend to the room.

When workers are not properly trained to work in a wardrobe room, they tend to find immediate solutions to the issues that arise as opposed to the *correct* solutions. For example, if an associate's uniform is not located in the appropriate slot, the attendant may just give them another uniform that has not been assigned to the associate. In many cases, this transaction is never recorded and a garment automatically goes missing from the system. This results in shortages and unnecessary expenses to the hotel.

When the Marriott Orlando World Center turned its wardrobe room operation over to Cintas' team of experts, it realized a savings of more than 25 percent in the first year. In the second year, Cintas' onsite solution helped it accrue an additional 50 percent savings.

“As soon as we transitioned to Cintas' onsite wardrobe management system, we began to see an automatic savings,” said Ron McAnagh, hotel manager at the Marriott Orlando World Center. “Their team of experts was able to resolve issues we were experiencing with inventory tracking without changing our actual room.”

#### **ISSUE: Lack of Inventory Control and Unnecessary Costs**

In many hotels, there is a lack of visibility for uniform inventory. When rooms are not properly managed, costs are accrued through small orders. For instance, if a “loaner” uniform is given to an associate and not recorded or a garment is sent to the cleaner and not returned, this can result in an additional expense to the hotel.

Without an accurate inventory history, it is difficult for managers to make long-term cost projections about uniform inventory which can result in lost operational dollars. Additional costs and shortages may accrue because managers do not have an accurate detail of the overall condition of the uniforms and proper inventory counts.

Excess uniform costs can be accrued a number of ways, including:

- A. Lost or stolen items
- B. Damaged garments
- C. Labor
- D. Inefficient processes

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Often, when the department managers are responsible for supplying and maintaining uniforms, expenses are even higher because they do not understand or have the time to understand the processes required to order and maintain uniforms. For example, a front

desk manager knows that he needs to order a replacement pair of pants for a female staff member. When the wrong size is ordered, the manager calls the supplier for the correct size, leaving the wrong size in a stack to be returned later. In many cases, this stack of displaced garments grows because managers are busy focusing on their guests and other immediate responsibilities.

To help keep better control of costs, Cintas partners with its customers to facilitate both the ordering process and inventory so they can focus on their core competency—serving their guests. When Cintas arrives at a property, it implements a system to track each piece of garment. For instance, if an associate requests a uniform, the wardrobe room attendant is able to go into the system and identify that the uniform was not returned the last time it was checked out.

To assist management with cost projections, Cintas provides hotel management with regular reports of inventory levels so budgets can be adjusted accordingly. For instance, managers can receive the following reports:

- Employee information report
- Available garments report
- Cleaner delinquent report
- Inventory analysis report
- Assignments not at par report
- Inventory status report
- Expenditure report
- Missing garments report
- Uniform room inventory report
- Loaner delinquent report
- Removed garments report

This detail increases the amount of information available to the hotel management, enabling them to keep costs under control and minimize loss.

When the Hotel Monteleone, a boutique hotel in New Orleans' French Quarter, was rebuilding from Katrina in 2005, the last thing on the mind of the hotel's director of operations, Steve Caputo, was a wardrobe room. However, as they began to reorder uniform inventory that was either lost or damaged by the storm, Caputo turned to his supplier, Cintas, to find a way to gain better control of costs, inventory and quality. While they previously had a bar-coding system, it was not used properly. Cintas was able to integrate the software into their operations to help improve costs.

“Having Cintas' management and reporting technology at our fingertips makes our wardrobe room much more efficient and cost effective,” said Caputo. “The bar-coding system enables us to accurately forecast when we will encounter expenses for replacements and new inventory.”

## **ISSUE: Inconsistent-Looking Garments**

Lack of garment knowledge often leads to inconsistencies in the appearance of uniforms, which presents another issue for wardrobe rooms managed by individuals from other departments. Hoteliers expect their associates to maintain an appearance that is consistent with the hotel's brand. If an employee's uniform appears wrinkled or worn, this can leave the guest with a negative impression of the staff.

At the Westin Kierland, a 732-room property in Scottsdale, Arizona, the existing wardrobe room was a deterrent from other staff responsibilities. Housekeeping personnel ran the room and each department manager was responsible for ordering uniforms for their staff. When uniforms went missing and the room became a catchall for displaced items such as mattresses, Bruce Lange, managing director, recognized the need for improvement.

"We were experiencing some difficulties ensuring that our uniforms were consistently crisp and on brand," said Lange. "When Cintas assumed responsibility for the wardrobe room, they were able to provide the expertise we needed, providing a much more organized and efficient operation."

When garments need to be mended or tailored, it is completed by a seamstress. However, many off site seamstresses may not have a good understanding of the uniform fabric, which can also result in an inconsistent appearance amongst hotel employees.

"The Cintas relationship has been very helpful in ensuring that the resort is outfitted in the best possible manner," added Lange. "They are able to provide us with the best information regarding the quality of the garment, span, stock inventories, etc. They also provide their own seamstress who has a good understanding of the fabrics. This helps us extend the life of our garments whenever possible."

Out of stock uniforms can present another issue for hotels. For example, if a certain color or style of garment is discontinued, this can result in inconsistencies between the appearance of associates when different colors and styles are substituted.

When hotels partner with Cintas, their wardrobe room director can keep managers apprised of potential discontinuations of certain styles and colors ahead of time. This prevents any surprises and gives time for them to order supply.

## **ISSUE: Improperly Designed Wardrobe Rooms**

Rather than just designating an area adjacent to the hotel laundry or staff break room as the wardrobe room, the room's design and construction needs to be a well thought out process. Several questions need to be asked in determining the needs of the space, including: How many staff will this room be servicing? Will uniforms be cleaned in-house or by a local cleaner? If the laundry is to be outsourced, how accessible are loading areas for pick-up and drop-off of items to be laundered?

For large properties like the Marriott World Center, when occupancy rates are around 80 percent, the wardrobe room will service as many as 100 associates in a single hour. Lacking adequate space to service associates can result in confusion and frustration to the staff, particularly if extensive delays cause them to be late to work.

In addition to an area for servicing associates, the room needs to have adequate space to hold appropriately sized conveyers for the number of uniforms the room will be servicing during peak periods. Smaller hotels may not require conveyer systems; however, they will still require adequate storage space.

Inadequate storage space was once an issue at the Westin Kierland before it partnered with Cintas for its onsite wardrobe solution. Prior to Cintas' arrival, the hotel's uniforms were haphazardly hung onto three large carousels in the room without size dividers. The

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carousels were surrounded by a chain-link cage that was locked during evening hours to prevent theft when attendants were not working. Over time, the room became disorganized and cluttered, making it difficult for attendants to locate the appropriate uniform for each staff member.

Another issue with the organization of the Westin's wardrobe room was the return box into which associates placed their clothes if an attendant was not on duty. If Westin staff members returned their uniforms after work during evening hours, they placed the soiled garments into a locked container. If any personal items such as keys or wallets were left in the uniform pockets, the employee would have to wait 24 to 36 hours to retrieve these items from the box.

With Cintas' onsite solution, the managers removed the hotel's numbering system for tracking garments and replaced it with a bar coding system for easy tracking. It added a slick rail and made a larger area drop-off area for employees. The Cintas team also adjusted the hours the room was staffed to avoid issues with lost items and reduce overall labor costs.

Once the proper equipment and room space is identified, the work flow is the next consideration when planning the room's design. For instance, how will wardrobe room attendants retrieve garments and deliver them to the associate? If more than one person is staffing the room, how much additional room is required so individuals are not bumping into one another?

Ultimately, the design of a wardrobe room should increase storage capacity, reduce costs, improve organization and ease for attendants and hotel staff to move around the room. To achieve this, Cintas conducts a preliminary audit to determine how much space is needed.

Because it doesn't work with a "one size fits all" model, Cintas assesses the specific needs of the facility and designs a wardrobe room that matches those needs.

### **ISSUE: Staff Do Not Use the Uniform Room**

For many hotel associates, the ability to have their uniforms laundered by the hotel is considered a perk of working there. However, when rooms are mismanaged and retrieving a uniform for work becomes more of a hassle than help, associates stop using it and morale can suffer.

This was the case at the Marriott World Center where only 40 percent of the hotel's staff were using the wardrobe room before Cintas assumed responsibility of it.

"It was regularly a topic of conversation around the hotel," said McAnagh. "There was always someone who was frustrated by their experience in the wardrobe room because items were either lost or took a long time for attendants to find."

Since partnering with Cintas to manage the room more than two years ago, 98 percent of the World Center Staff are now using the wardrobe room services—a 145 percent increase.

Having a well run uniform room also helps improve staff morale. When associates are greeted by someone with a smile at the start of their shift, it helps set the tone for the day.

"The two women who staff our wardrobe do a fantastic job," said Caputo. "They always have a smile on their face and are a part of our team."

In addition to providing competent service, Cintas employees who staff uniform rooms become seamlessly integrated into the hotel's staff. Attendants receive hotel email addresses and participate in staff meetings so they can be kept apprised of the events and information that may impact the uniform room.

"There is no difference between the service culture Cintas employees demonstrate and our service culture," said Lange. "Most associates do not even realize that they are not Starwood associates. They work well together and operate as a seamless operation. We have found the uniform manager to be very thorough and contribute to the success of the resort at the same level as any other manager in the resort."

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## **What Can a Wardrobe Room Do for You?**

As the hospitality industry becomes increasingly competitive and hotels compete for guest loyalty, managers are looking for ways to differentiate their business. By partnering with their uniform supplier and using their expertise as a resource, renown hotels of all sizes such as the Hotel Monteleone, Westin Kierland and Marriott World Center are realizing the benefits of using a uniform room. From substantial cost savings, precise inventory control, enhanced reporting services to improved associate appearance, there are a myriad of reasons to switch to an onsite service solution from Cintas.

*For more information on how an onsite solution can benefit your hotel or to schedule a consultation, please e-mail Rodney Ward at [lodgingsolutions@cintas.com](mailto:lodgingsolutions@cintas.com).*