

The Rental Option

For some education facilities, renting cleaning equipment as it is needed may be preferable to purchasing it.

BY MICHAEL SCHAFFER



When determining whether to rent or purchase a cleaning machine, education institutions should consider how often the machine will be used. Photo courtesy of Tornado Industries

It will probably be years before all the social and structural ramifications of the economic downturn are fully realized. However, one interesting consequence already is materializing. According to Amy Hoak, a reporter for *MarketWatch*, a *Wall Street Journal* publication, for the

first time in decades, more people say they would rather rent a home than purchase one.

But it goes further than that. This loss of interest in home ownership is not necessarily because of the high foreclosure rates or shaky recovery. Instead, Hoak says, more people

simply are rejecting the idea that home ownership is a good investment, believing their money might go further—and certainly be more liquid—in other types of investment opportunities.

The question now is just how far this “renting” idea will go when it



Cost savings is a primary factor when considering whether to purchase a large cleaning machine. Photo courtesy of CFR

comes to other items that traditionally are bought instead of leased. For instance, some education institutions, hard-pressed because of budget cuts, are considering renting cleaning equipment on an as-needed basis instead of buying it.

The reasons for this go beyond just the possible cost savings. But before managers decide to follow the renting route, they should know more about renting professional cleaning equipment: the upsides and downsides, when it is most advantageous, and when purchasing a machine still is the best option.

WHY RENT?

The most obvious reason a school or university would consider renting an automatic scrubber, burnisher or carpet extractor? A daily rental fee is far less than buying the machine. So cost savings should be a primary factor when considering renting cleaning equipment. A related factor is how the decision will affect cash flow. Renting a machine is an as-needed expense; however, financing a machine to purchase it means the equipment becomes a monthly expense.

Other reasons renting might be a good option:

- **A test drive.** Some large cleaning machines are virtually small automobiles and, just as with a car, the maintenance department may want to take it for a spin before signing on the dotted line.

- **Tax simplification.** Handling the purchase of more expensive cleaning equipment for tax purposes can be complicated. For instance, it may be amortized or depreciated over time, or it may be best to simply deduct the purchase amount, if possible, on the calendar year's taxes. With renting, tax issues are fairly straightforward. The cost to rent the machine typically is fully deductible.

- **An extra hand.** This is one of the key reasons large facilities rent cleaning equipment. Often, for special projects such as floor refinishing, several custodial workers are brought

in to complete the job. To have “all hands on deck,” so to speak, facilities may rent extra floor machines, air movers and wet/vac vacuum cleaners to bolster worker productivity and get the job done as fast as possible.

•**New construction cleanup and emergencies.** Although these are different situations, they can be lumped together because they are special events when a rental machine may be necessary. Cleaning up after construction work or damage such as floods often calls for rarely used equipment that many facilities do not have on hand. Renting the equipment as needed typically is more cost-effective.

•**No maintenance.** Not having to maintain a machine is another benefit

however, often the items they stock are designed for the residential market. Residential cleaning equipment typically will not meet the needs of schools and universities. Further, instruction on using the equipment properly may be limited at a rental location.

It may prove more beneficial to work with a janitorial distributor that sells and rents professional cleaning equipment. They will have a better idea of what type of machine is best suited for an education institution's cleaning needs. They also will know how a machine works and how to use it properly. Although they may not provide the “hand-holding” and special services they offer purchasing customers, they are likely to make sure

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of renting. If the machine needs repair, it's someone else's problem.

Despite the benefits of renting, an education institution may determine that purchasing equipment may be wiser in some cases. How often the machine will be used will determine if the facility should rent or buy. If a professional cleaning machine must be rented on an ongoing basis, even two or three times a month, the costs of renting most likely will surpass the costs of purchasing.

Convenience is another factor that could make buying preferable to renting. When the equipment is in a janitor's closet, it is handy and ready to go whenever needed.

SELECTING EQUIPMENT

Many schools and universities have situations when they must rent a machine. There typically are two options for renting cleaning equipment: a rental agency or a janitorial distributorship that rents cleaning equipment.

More agencies are offering professional cleaning equipment for rent;

school staff members know how to use a machine properly before taking it out the door.

Like any wise consumer, an education institution's maintenance and custodial staff should know something about the cleaning equipment that is being rented. For instance:

•**Look for equipment that is manufactured by a company that specializes in professional cleaning equipment.** In most cases, equipment from well-known, reputable manufacturers will clean efficiently and effectively.

•**Avoid selecting a machine based on its daily rental charge.** High-quality cleaning equipment can be costly. However, a less expensive machine may not perform as well or may not be good for the job.

•**Inquire what green attributes the**

equipment offers. For floor machines, look for more advanced machines that use less water and chemicals—these have less impact on the environment. In some cases, a cylindrical brush floor machine will be the greenest option. Look for vacuum cleaners with a HEPA filtration system, and consider portable carpet extractors that recycle and filter water and cleaning solution as they operate. This reduces the amount of water and chemicals necessary for cleaning carpets.

•**User-friendly machines make the job easier and faster.** A user-friendly machine is quiet, which helps reduce fatigue. Many have ergonomic handles and a simple user interface. Additionally, look for a brush (if a cylindrical floor machine) or pads on a rotary machine that can be changed easily and quickly.

Another advantage of renting from a janitorial distributor is that a school eventually may want to buy a machine. In such a case, it has already carried out a “test drive,” and its workers will know the machine, how to use it, and how it can serve cleaning needs. ■

SCHAFFER is a senior executive with Tacony's Commercial Floor Care division and president of Tornado Industries, West Chicago, Ill.
MSCHAFFER@TORNADOVAC.COM

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