

Making Good Casinos Great

Simple solutions for assuring a positive first impression

A casino's image goes a long way with guests. In fact, in today's age of user-generated reviews and pictures, image can mean the difference between a customer patronizing your casino, staying at your hotel or booking a convention. For example, TripAdvisor™, one of the largest travel websites with user-generated content, attracts nearly 30 million monthly visitors. It is estimated that as many as 88 percent of these visitors are influenced by content they read. Oftentimes, these reviews will include pictures guests have taken of rooms, common areas and the surrounding grounds. And according to the latest Market Metrix Hospitality Index™ results, one in five casino customers read a review about a property before booking that casino.¹

While many properties may not have a budget for a thorough upgrade, there are several small initiatives that casino managers can take to extend the life of their current assets while bolstering their overall image and positively impacting guest satisfaction. This whitepaper will outline simple actions managers can take to elevate the image and safety of their casino or resort, ensuring that guests are left with a favorable impression so that when their reviews go up, customer count and occupancy do not go down.

The Power of a First Impression

OPPORTUNITY AREA - Floor Care: *A professional floor care program improves guest perceptions and repeat bookings*

I. Matting Programs Keep Dirt Outside Where It Belongs

As the adage goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. From the minute a guest steps on the property and walks through the lobby door, they are evaluating everything they see. As a result, the overall cleanliness and appearance of the lobby is one of the first areas to make a substantial guest impression.

However, no matter how hard a housekeeping staff works, it can be very difficult to keep up with soil and dust being tracked into a property. Discolored carpet and water spots on tile floors along with dirt on carpet can negatively influence a guest's perception of cleanliness which in turn can impact occupancy. A recent independent study conducted by Harris Interactive found that 70 percent of U.S. adults would likely not rebook with a hospitality establishment with dirty lobby floors and entryways. As a result, casino leadership should work with housekeeping to ensure the right resources are in place for executing a comprehensive floor care program, which takes into account entrance elements, floor surface types, weather patterns and pedestrian traffic flow.

Approximately 70 to 80 percent of dirt enters a building through the front door. A matting program is a simple proven way to reduce the contaminants such as dirt, sand or pebbles that travel inside the building and protect floors against high traffic.² Stopping these outside contaminants requires a dual mat system that consists of scraper mats outside the building and carpet mats inside the door. In addition to catching debris not caught by scraper mats, carpet mats also capture water. Inside the

¹ <http://www.marketmetrix.com/en/default.aspx?p=User-generatedreviews&s=research>

² <http://www.cleanlink.com/sm/article/Matting-Leaving-Dirt-At-The-Door--9209>

building, they can be strategically placed in corridors or in areas where building occupants frequently stand to reduce wear patterns.

In addition to the location, length is another important consideration to make when developing a matting program. A test conducted by the International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA) found that only 30 percent of dirt is trapped in three feet of mat, while 85 percent of dirt is trapped in 15 feet of mat. As a result, carpet mats should cover the first 15 feet inside the building. Using the optimal mat length will have a substantial impact on the overall appearance of floors in the entryway and adjacent hallways, maximizing the amount of water and dirt captured.

To ensure these mats are properly maintained and always look their best, many casinos opt for a serviced matting program. In a serviced program, mats are regularly laundered by a commercial laundry service, maximizing the amount of dust and soil collected by each mat. In addition to keeping mats looking their best, these services also help extend the life of floors by protecting against wear patterns in high traffic areas.

Cintas offers customized, high-image mats that can insure that your casino is projecting the correct image at each entryway. Logo mats at the entrance can not only enhance safety, but also enhance the brand of the property.

II. What's Your Floor Type? Deep Cleaning Tile & Carpet

When floors begin to look worn or spotty, many casino managers' first inclination is to replace existing carpet or tile, straining capital budgets. Rather than fully replacing floors, deep cleaning systems can revitalize surfaces and delay total replacement projects and related costs. The most effective deep cleaning system will utilize pre-spraying, agitation, a high-pressure steam rinse and thorough extraction of soil, cleaning chemicals and moisture.

Hard Floors - Hard floor coverings, often used for entryways, elevator banks and kitchen flooring, require daily maintenance. However, it is equally important to deep clean tile surfaces and darkened grout lines to remove imbedded soils and keep floors clean and looking good. Deep cleaning on a regular schedule will help ensure your hard surface floors maintain their appearance for a much longer period of time.

Carpet - While an excellent covering choice for reducing noise and enhancing comfort, carpet also requires regular maintenance and attention. Ongoing maintenance programs such as vacuuming and interim cleaning should be complemented by regular deep cleaning to maximize the life of the carpet. When performed regularly, hot water extraction methods will effectively remove soil and residue left in the carpet. This process can help revitalize carpet fibers in many situations and reduce much of the downtime associated with other cleaning processes. This allows cleaning to be performed in off-peak hours. In addition, a coat of fiber protectant can help fibers resist many stains.

While floors should look good throughout all areas of a casino, their appearance in guest rooms will leave a distinct impression on guests. Cleanliness issues in the room are cited as one of the three primary complaints in a casino, aside from noise and heating ventilation and air conditioning issues,

according to a recent study by J.D. Power and Associates.³ Overall, 28 percent of respondents identified room cleanliness as an issue with it being the number one concern for budget properties. Clean guest rooms will differentiate your property.

A particular cleanliness-related complaint that can plague casino managers is odor. The J.D. Power and Associates survey identified room odor as a particularly prevalent issue in the luxury segment, where it is the third most frequently reported complaint. Unpleasant scents can stem from a variety of sources, including smoke, water damage, neglected carpet stains and the accumulation of dust and dirt. To effectively neutralize odors, potential odor sources must be eradicated. This can be done by thoroughly deep cleaning every surface throughout the room, including drapery, carpets and upholstery.

Laura Lambert, Executive Housekeeper at the Marriott Northeast in Cincinnati, OH, used Cintas professional tile and carpet cleaning services to help the property pass its annual audit inspection. Their eight-year-old carpet was worn and tattered, showing particular signs of age in the guest rooms. In preparation for their audit, Lambert deep cleaned carpets by using Cintas' carpet and tile cleaning program. The property received a passing carpet condition grade, allowing it to score a total of 98 percent on the overall audit.

"The auditor was so impressed with how well carpet care has been managed since the last audit that he gave us the points necessary for a passing score," said Lambert. "The program and our Cintas representative exceeded our expectations."

Whether it is a small riverboat or a luxury casino, implementing an ongoing floor maintenance program will enhance the appearance of floors while limiting odor and wear patterns. This extends the useful life of the floor and delays expensive replacement projects. In addition to the implementation of a comprehensive matting system, regular maintenance should be complemented by regular deep cleaning. In high traffic areas, deep cleaning should be performed several times per year depending on traffic. By having a well-designed floor care program in place, casino managers have a cost-effective alternative to regular replacement and can keep floors looking like new year round.

OPPORTUNITY AREA– Guest/Employee Safety and Security:

Guests want the reassurance that they are as secure as they would be in their own home

I. Threat: Fires

- **Solution – A Streamlined Fire Prevention Program**

Unfortunately, an estimated 3,900 fires occur each year in hospitality establishments. Annually, these fires result in \$76 million in property loss.⁴

According to a recent report by the U.S. Fire Administration, 46 percent of hospitality establishment fires are caused by cooking, with electrical malfunctions and heating each causing an additional 7 percent of fires. These fires occur primarily in the evening, between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.

³ <http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles.aspx/4128/Guest-problems-better-prevented-than-resolved>

⁴ <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/media/press/2010releases/020410.shtm>

While 73 percent of fires are confined to the object of origin, 18 percent are confined to the room of fire origin and the remaining 9 percent of fires extend beyond the room of origin.⁵

While building requirements and local fire codes will often dictate the design of suppression and extinguisher systems, casino managers should be proactive in ensuring that all types of fire prevention equipment such as extinguishers, suppression systems and sprinkler systems are regularly inspected in advance of the walk-through with local officials. In many casinos, this is often performed by several suppliers at several different times of the year.

Casino managers can improve the efficiency of their maintenance operations by streamlining vendors to one source for fire prevention training, supplies and service. This helps casinos maintain an “always ready” fire prevention system on a consistent basis with less work required by the property itself. Additionally, casino owners and operators can benefit from the efficiencies of partnering with one company capable of providing fire protection services to all properties within their portfolio.

II. Threat – Illness of Staff or Guests

- **Solution: AEDs, First Aid Equipment, and Training**

Similar to fire prevention systems, being prepared with First Aid and Safety programs sends the message that you care about your guests and your employees.

Automatic external defibrillators or AEDs are effective tools for protecting guests and staff members. Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is a condition that kills 1,000 Americans every day. Studies show that if early defibrillation is provided within the first minute someone collapses from SCA, the odds are 90 percent that the victim’s life can be saved. After that, the rate of survival drops 10 percent with every minute that passes. As many as 30 to 50 percent of SCA victims would likely survive if CPR and AEDs were deployed within five minutes of collapse.⁶

Casinos should take a proactive step by having an AED program in place to help a guest or employee in distress. AEDs should be located throughout the casino and quickly accessible from the location of the fallen victim within a three-minute period. Selecting AED units capable of providing video and audio guidance every step of the way while in use will help ensure users are able to properly utilize the equipment during an emergency situation. It is equally important to make sure the AEDs are regularly maintained so they are always ready to use when needed.

Similarly, first aid equipment and supplies should be strategically placed around the facility to ensure essential first-aid supplies such as bandages, peroxide and other seasonal items such as common allergy or cold relief medicines are easily accessible throughout the property. Rather than using a store to supply first-aid supplies, using a designated vendor to replenish first-aid cabinets will help reduce costs and ensure that supplies are available at all times.

An essential component of any first aid and safety program for casino managers is employee training. Whether it is done in person by an experienced instructor or online through a comprehensive training program proper training for staff members is critical. Training courses on

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <http://associationdatabase.com/aws/SCAA/pt/sp/edmaterials>

first aid, CPR, bloodborne pathogens, OSHA compliance and AED usage will help ensure a casino's staff is well prepared to handle emergency situations.

III. Threat – Identity Theft

- **Solution: A Document Shredding Program**

Identity theft is an all too common issue in casinos; however, a document shredding program is one of the easiest and simplest services casinos can implement to protect guests and make business processes more efficient.

A typical document shredding program might include a locked bin to be placed behind the front desk, in administrative offices, in the cage or casino credit office, and in conference areas. Once placed in the bin, documents are retrieved by a certified and secure third-party service. This prevents confidential information from being compromised by illegitimate third parties, further enhancing guest security and protecting against incidents of identity theft or compromised confidential information such as credit card receipts. Further, it helps improve administrative efficiencies as casino staff does not need to spend time manually shredding documents.

Shannon Woolard, the director of operations for six properties in Atlanta, uses Cintas as one source for the first-aid, AED and document management needs of all the properties she manages. For Woolard, the benefit is having a single point of contact to manage each of the areas has been a particular asset in making her management processes more efficient.

“Over time, we have been able to build up a relationship with our Cintas representative which has been a great benefit,” she said. “We use multiple Cintas solutions throughout all of our properties, so whenever there is an issue or we need service, I can just call Scott Beyke and I will know that it is handled.”

OPPORTUNITY AREA - Image: *Money is often invested in improving a property's infrastructure, but not all facets of a property's image are covered*

All facets of a property impact guest perception, but some are addressed more frequently than others. After the landscaping and drop-off area, casino staff members are likely to be the first thing a visitor sees when they arrive on property. In fact, a study by the Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration indicates that front of the house personnel are one of the most visible components in a casino.⁷ As a result, it is important that staff look their best at all times, while providing an accurate reflection of the casino brand. For example, a stylish beverage server or casino dealer may reaffirm a guest's perception of quality at a luxury property. All staff members are ambassadors of the property, so their attire should reflect that role and responsibility.

Developing and implementing a new apparel program for a casino's staff is one of the least expensive renovations a property could make. Since employees are often the connector between a property and its guests, a new uniform program will go a long way towards influencing a guest's perception of your casino. An apparel update is a simple way to renovate a property while avoiding a “pardon our dust” disruption.

⁷ http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/62927265_1.html

Casino managers looking for a quick and easy apparel update should consider the simple addition of accessories. As fashion designer Giorgio Armani once noted, “Fashion accessories are important and becoming more and more important every day.”⁸

For women, consider new scarves which can be worn around the neck, in the hair or around the waist as a belt. Dubbed as one of fashion’s most timeless accessories, scarves can enhance the appearance of female staff with the colors of the season or even accent hues of the brand. Replacing blouses or shirts is another way to completely transform the appearance of a casino’s staff members. With options ranging from full length or ¾” sleeve blouses for cooler weather to silk shells in the summer, refreshing blouses seasonally can give a fresh update to an existing program.

For male staff, updating neckwear can help complement new color schemes or seasonal trends. Ties with diagonal stripes, polka dots, plaids and subtle patterns can transform the appearance of front office staff members while also adding a stylish element to their appearance. Of course updating shirting is also a simple way to upgrade a male employee’s apparel program.

While back of the house apparel isn’t always given as much attention, it is just as important to ensure these workers maintain a clean, well kept appearance as they will also interface with guests. However, when determining the construction and color of the uniform, it is important to consider the job function. Jobs that require more manual labor around the property will become more highly soiled compared to other positions in the casino. For example, maintenance workers or kitchen staff might experience stains that come from their interaction with chemicals or oils.

Rather than a purchased apparel program, many casinos have found success with rented apparel programs for maintenance, kitchen and housekeeping staff. Some have even chosen to rent their security uniforms to insur a consistently professional look. This eliminates the upfront inventory cost associated with a purchased apparel program and ensures that apparel is always professionally cleaned, pressed and mended. Further, as seasonal staff are added or removed, inventory levels can be adjusted accordingly which can result in substantial cost savings and a reduction in required working capital.

OPPORTUNITY AREA: High Employee Morale Positively Impacts the Guest Experience

A key to keeping guests happy is keeping staff members happy. Ultimately, employees who look good will feel good, and this can translate into a better experience for guests. The opposite is also true – a study by Market Metrix shows that guests who report an issue with casino staff are 47 percent less likely to return.⁹ To keep staff looking and feeling their best, casino managers should implement programs that reduce strain, improve comfort and allow staff to feel better quickly if they are suffering from congestion or other common ailments.

For staff members who are consistently on their feet and interacting with guests, anti-fatigue matting can be an easy and welcomed solution to remedy strain from standing. By encouraging movement in calf and leg muscles, anti-fatigue mats facilitate the flow of blood throughout the legs – a process

⁸ <http://www.famousquotesabout.com/quote/Accessories-are-important-and/217682>

⁹ <http://www.marketmetrix.com/en/default.aspx?p=research12&s=research>

that is limited when standing on hard surfaces. In addition to reducing strain, anti-fatigue matting has also been shown to improve productivity and reduce absenteeism.

An apparel update is another way to bolster employee morale. An outdated or poorly selected apparel program can leave associates unhappy, which can negatively impact guests. Time-starved casino managers may not fully consider the potential impact of a uniform program on staff. According to the Cornell study, “The result of a poor selection (that is, a uniform that doesn't function well or looks bad) is that the uniform can actually have a negative effect on employee attitudes and, perhaps, lead to customer dissatisfaction.”

In addition to style, fabric composition is an important consideration. Breathable, durable fabrics will further increase staff comfort, particularly in job functions like public area cleaning that requires frequent movement. This is especially important during warmer seasons.

Casino managers are also integrating eco-fabrics into their apparel programs. Made from recycled plastic bottles, these fabrics can have a positive impact on employee morale because staff members appreciate a choice that is good for the environment.

Finally, providing staff with easily accessible first aid medicine will limit uncomfortable symptoms from common ailments such as headaches, allergies or cold-related symptoms. Rather than struggling through the day, convenient access to over-the-counter remedies will help improve morale and guest interactions.

Simple Steps to Ensure a Positive Impression

It has been said that it can cost as much as five times more to attract a new customer than retain current customers. Providing guests with a favorable image of your property is one easy way to keep guests returning and make sure they share their positive experience with friends and in online reviews.

No one wants to see a negative review of their casino or hear that a guest has had a less than satisfactory experience. To capitalize on the potential impact of the first impression, it is important to ensure all the right systems are in place. This means making sure that the property and staff look good so guests and staff feel great. A simple initiative like making sure carpets in entryway areas are deep cleaned on a quarterly basis can go a long way with guests. Yet often these simple steps are overlooked in the demanding complexity of managing a casino property.

Implementing these image-enhancing solutions does not have to create more work. Time is a valuable resource, so streamlining services and working with one vendor that can optimize supply chain efficiencies will reduce the amount of operator time required. Further, it allows casino managers additional time to manage their properties and focus on further enhancing their guests' experience.

By thinking ahead and having the right programs in place, casino managers can see their employee and customer satisfaction, as well as business results, move from good to great. In the end, it's the little things that make all the difference.

Cintas Corporation is a leading supplier of uniform direct sale and rental, safe floor solutions, clean kitchen solutions, van delivered first aid and safety supplies, AEDs, training, fire protection services, as well as document shredding, imaging, and storage to the hospitality industry. For more information, go to www.cintasgaminl.com.