

***The following article is published in the Spring 2008 issue of American School and Hospital Magazine***

## **Dedicated or All in One**

By Mark Cuddy

Selecting a new floor machine can be as challenging as buying a new television. Facility managers, just like consumers, have to consider a variety of options before making their decision.

Why? Starting about five or six years ago, all-in-one televisions—sets with built-in DVD players and VCRs—became quite popular. Instead of purchasing three different components, which can get expensive and involve a lot of space and wiring, the one set had everything, all in one place, and usually at an affordable price.

However, today flat-screen televisions are taking over the market, and conventional sets are slowly being phased out. But most of these new flat-screen televisions are essentially a monitor without any added components; they are dedicated to producing images. This means buyers must purchase the DVD and VCR systems—and sound systems as well—separately.

Some experts will tell you that the all-in-one televisions meet most consumer needs and can prove to be a true cost savings. Others argue that when consumers purchase each unit separately, they usually find that the individual components are of higher quality, improving the viewing experience considerably.

School and hospital administrators in the market for new floorcare equipment face a similar dilemma. Should they select an all-in-one, multitasking floor machine that can clean, scrub, and polish floors, or a dedicated machine that performs just one or two cleaning tasks but does so exceptionally well? Which is the most cost effective, and which may result in improved worker productivity—a key concern because floorcare, by some estimates, is as much as 90 percent labor?

### **Enter the All-in-One Machines**

Conventional floor machines such as rotary buffers evolved out of machines used to sand and restore wood floors and other wood products nearly 100 years ago. These low-speed machines, rotating at 175 rpm



(revolutions per minute), could be used for stripping floors, scrubbing, and polishing. However, the user had to change pads, mops, and mop heads and make other adjustments to perform these different tasks. Additionally, considerable training was necessary to operate these machines properly, and they could be physically stressful to use.

By the mid-1950s, floor scrubbers were introduced that could perform many of these duties as well as mechanically mop and dry a floor all in one pass. Obviously, even though these multitasking machines were often more costly than

dedicated floor machines—usually about two to three times the price—if they could perform all of these different cleaning duties well and be operated by just one cleaning technician, they could offer real overall cost savings because of the reduced labor involved.

Although the early all-in-one machines had their drawbacks, over the years they have been improved significantly and have added features, making them even more effective. For instance, some of the latest all-in-one floor machines now have computerized detergent-dispensing systems that precisely dilute and meter the amount of cleaning solution used. This helps eliminate chemical waste. And because it usually results in less chemical used, it can help “Green” floorcare as well because when less chemical is used it reduces cleaning’s impact on the environment.

And in recent years, these all-in-one machines have evolved into larger ride-on machines that combine a variety of floorcare tasks and can significantly improve worker productivity. However, because of their size, they cannot be used in most restrooms or smaller areas typically found in a school or medical facility.

### **Still Room for Dedicated Machines**

Although purchasing a single all-in-one machine may be less expensive than purchasing multiple dedicated machines, some administrators find they prefer the dedicated machines and believe they may actually be a more effective way of cutting costs. These facilities report that purchasing one all-in-one machine can actually hamper worker productivity. That’s because the cleaning technicians all need to share just one floor machine. If multiple, dedicated floor machines are selected, this often allows cleaning workers to perform

more floorcare tasks in more areas of a facility, bolstering worker productivity.

And just as with the televisions discussed earlier, many administrators argue that floor machines designed to perform just one or two cleaning tasks actually do so better than all-in-one equipment. This is because some dedicated machines have higher rpms than all-in-one machines, which can help improve the appearance of floors and give them that “wet look” that some facilities want. Additionally, these machines have seen their share of technological advances as well. These include such things as:

- Some of today’s dedicated machines have a more contoured, user-friendly design than older machines. This optimizes sight lines above and around the machine.
- With the introduction of cylindrical brush floorcare technology—floor machines that use rotating brushes instead of pads—the dedicated machines have become much easier to operate.
- Many of today’s machines are much lighter than older models, because they are made of molded rotational plastic, which is light yet durable.
- Some machines are designed so that the handles can be folded down for easier transport and storage.
- More single-purpose burnishers are no longer propane powered but battery operated. This helps protect indoor air quality and allows for quieter operation; they also have extended amp hours, meaning the batteries last

longer between recharging, and do not require as much battery maintenance.

- Some burnishers have been redesigned with rear bumpers, allowing them to be tilted to rest on floor surfaces for easier access to pads and components.
- Some machines have passive vacuum systems to capture and trap dust generated in floor maintenance, which helps protect indoor air quality.

Another benefit that dedicated machines—especially cylindrical floor machines—may have over all-in-one units is that they are often better able than multitaskers to clean and maintain a variety of floor types.

### **Impact on Worker Training**

Whichever type of machine is selected, an all-in-one multitasker or a dedicated unit, it will require adequate worker training to be used correctly and safely and to produce the cleaning and maintenance results desired. As a matter of fact, John Walker, founder of Janitor University, says that in his experience, even the best cleaning tools and equipment, no matter how well designed or how technologically advanced, will yield only marginal results unless they are used properly, which comes about through adequate training.

Walker suggests that it is often good practice in a school or hospital facility to have one person responsible for overseeing floorcare training programs so that all workers are taught the same instructions and learn the same cleaning expectations of the facility. “Having one person [responsible for training] makes certain current and new

hires learn correct procedures and that training upgrades are provided on a regular basis,” he says.

Additionally, cleaning technicians can take advantage of a number of training programs offered by highly reputable schools that teach the latest floorcare skills and methods no matter what type of machine is used. These schools include the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) program and ISSA. These educational organizations view floorcare as a science and, as such, realize it involves certain knowledge in order to be performed correctly.

Mark Cuddy is regional sales manager with Tornado, manufacturers of professional cleaning tools and equipment.