

Mopping Systems: A Matter Of Personal Preference

End users aren't all the same. Why should their mopping systems be?

By Lisa Ridgely, Deputy Editor of Contracting Profits
Email the SM editors

Every end user has a basic need for mop and bucket systems, no matter what types of flooring and facilities they clean. As products and cleaning science evolve, building service contractors (BSCs) and in-house service professionals (ISPs) tend to be open-minded enough to try new methods and tools. To commit to a system, though, they need to get a thumbs-up from the front line workers who use them, and know that it is affordable and sustainable, and above all, that it works.

To help end users make the best mopping system purchases, jan/san distributors must understand the factors behind those decisions. End users want a system that is easy for workers to use and maintain, attractive, quiet, right for the needs of a facility, and most importantly, reasonably priced.

So, the first step for distributors is to know what kind of buildings and floors their customers have and what types of cleaning is required. It's also important to know what customers' access to water is like at their facilities.

Other factors include the number of restrooms and rooms with hard flooring that need to be cleaned, for example, or how many workers are on a job.

Mops have evolved from the simple cotton string mop to include microfiber materials, in both string mop and flat mop applications. Their handles and parts are more lightweight and ergonomically designed, and parts can be replaced more easily than before.

Bucket options include baffled walls to reduce spillage, systems that accommodate both traditional and flat mops, and drainage holes to eliminate the strain and mess of dumping water — as well as the

option to go bucketless with self-contained systems thanks to solution tanks in the handle that spray the floor surface.

String Mops

Despite the popularity of microfiber flat mops, traditional cotton string mops are by no means phased out of cleaning regimens. At a basic level, BSCs and ISPs use them for jobs such as big spills or leaks, in which the mops can absorb a great amount of liquid. Many janitors also still use string mops for stripping and waxing jobs.

For Isis Naguib, director of housekeeping at the [Millennium Hotel](#) in Minneapolis, string mops are still the best option for everyday mopping of hardwood, marble and tile floors.

"We try different things, but we always go back to this one," Naguib says.

Switching to microfiber mops would have required more maintenance of mop heads than the staff were used to, as well as the purchasing of all new buckets. The string mop buckets are easier to manage, she adds.

For other end users, string mops just work better on specific types of flooring. For instance, some end users prefer string mops for corrugated floors or ceramic tile situations, as they might better absorb the water between tiles in the grout lines.

"There are some applications where I can't use a flat mop," says Larry Faust, owner of Cleanway Maintenance Services in Brownsburg, Ind. "A flat mop's not as absorbent as a string mop."

String mops are the best solution for spills, says Jay Souza, retail operations director for Newton, Mass.-based [UGL Unicco](#), which services many shopping mall accounts. In food courts, Souza says, string mops are still king.

Microfiber

Some users, however, are sold on microfiber for a variety of mopping applications. Among those favoring microfiber flat mop systems is Dee Littlejohn, director of custodial operations for [Dallas Theological Seminary](#), where floor types vary from VCT to ceramic to concrete to gym floor. The Dallas seminary uses microfiber mops for nearly all applications, including finishing and waxing. Not only are microfiber mops ergonomically friendly and lightweight, they equate to cost savings in multiple ways.

"We purchased a washer and dryer so we could turn them around ourselves. It was a pretty huge cost savings because we were sending our mop heads out for cleaning," Littlejohn says. "So doing it in-house provides not only cost savings but convenience. I think one of the issues that some people have is the up-front cost to get your whole campus up and running on microfiber. I think the big picture for us anyway is cost savings."

One benefit of microfiber mop heads is their portability. Whether they are soaked in water to be used for damp applications, or used dry for dust mopping, many mop heads can fit easily on a janitor cart. They can be rolled up and placed in a bucket of solution, to be replaced as they get dirty, or stacked neatly for future dry mopping.

Lack of water accessibility makes a huge difference, as multiple janitor trips to a remote water source reduces the productivity of workers. If end users can save water, performing the same level of cleaning by switching to microfiber, that has a green benefit as well.

Cleanway Maintenance Systems has found success using self-contained flat mop systems, otherwise known as bucketless systems, in school accounts. The mops the company uses carry more than 20 ounces of chemical in a reservoir or charging bucket, says Faust, enabling a lot of mopping with a relatively small amount of water.

"They're fantastic," Faust says. "I found that it works 10 times better than hauling water from slop sinks all over the school."

Accessories such as the charging bucket also help cut down on water usage and trips to a sink. Janitorial carts that work with a microfiber mop system accommodate the smaller storage and charging buckets as well as mopping buckets. End users note that microfiber systems tend to be easier to maneuver than traditional string mop buckets, as well.

Bucket Care

Buckets themselves are an integral part of any janitorial program. They can last years, but it's their parts, such as the wheel bearings and wringers, that break down and need to be fixed. Part maintenance — daily rinsing of all parts, full drying of the bucket system, and interim deep cleaning of parts — as well as careful handling of mops, should ensure the longevity of a bucket system.

However, when parts do break or malfunction, many end users simply replace buckets, because, as Souza says, replacing a wringer costs almost as much as replacing the whole bucket system. For BSCs, new accounts also mean the purchase of new buckets. Baffled buckets, or those that have a system to reduce splashing and spillage, have become the standard bucket for many end users when purchasing products.

"I like a steady bucket because most of my locations, they have ceramic tile, so it's not a smooth surface," Souza says.

Whether a user purchases single or dual buckets is dependant upon the cleaning jobs. Most basic mopping jobs require a single bucket. For big cleaning projects, dual bucket systems come in handy, with one bucket for clean water and one for dirty water.

"Dual buckets are better for places like food courts, so as to not change the water as often," Souza says. "All of my locations have one or two of those."

Also, stripping and waxing calls for a dual bucket system.

Ergonomically, bucket systems have improved dramatically. They are easier to pull and push, made of lighter weight materials, and feature drainage holes in the bottom. These advances have helped contribute to safety in the workplace.

Many factors are considered by end users when determining what bucket system is right for them. Knowing their facilities, whether they are practicing green cleaning, and their workforce is key to matching them with the right systems.

Lisa Ridgely is the deputy editor of [Contracting Profits](#), a sister publication of Sanitary Maintenance.

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