



Working in partnership with the customers

H J Weir is a strong believer in the value of building close working relationships with the laundries it supplies and takes a personal interest in the customer's business. Bates of London provides a good example of the way the strategy works

Bates of London, a premier provider of laundry and rental services to hotels, spas and fitness centres in London and the home counties, and feeder and folder specialist H J Weir have worked together since the 1960s. There are several parallels between the two companies. Both are family-owned businesses, currently run by father and son. The Bates Group is run by David Pantlin as chairman and owner, with Matthew Pantlin as managing director.

Similarly, H J Weir is headed by managing director Rob Weir whose son Ross Weir has been a company director since 2006.

The two companies have established strong personal links with their customers.

Ross Weir welcomes laundry managers at the company HQ where they can see Weir's full capabilities and Bates takes a similar approach.

Anne Hardy, senior manager of operations at Bates' Leyton site, says the company has an "open door policy" encouraging hotels to come and look round the laundry so they see the processes that the linen goes through and realise the care that the company takes to produce a high quality result.

The Bates Group's main laundry is now at Leyton in East London, though the group also includes a plant in Enfield, trading under the Aqua brand, where it can provide a drycleaning service for use by a hotel's guests and for cleaning corporate staff uniforms.

The Leyton plant employs around 200 staff who work in two shifts. Its customer base includes some of London's top hotels and fitness centres.

The main work is in flatwork – duvets, sheets, pillowcases and also food and beverage items such as

tablecloths, napkins and banqueting linen.

It also deals with chefs' wear and has a separate area for towels.

Most of the hotel customers have nominated stock, rather than pool items, although napkins are usually an



FAMILY BUSINESSES: Both Bates of London and H J Weir are family run businesses run by a father and son team. Top: David Pantlin, owner and chairman of Bates (left) with managing director Matthew Pantlin, Below right managing director Rob Weir with director Ross Weir

exception. From wash through to packing and delivery, great attention is paid to detail.

Much of the work arrives pre-sorted but the rest is classed and sorted on-site. All work is then loaded into 50kg bags, which are delivered by overhead rail to the 10-compartment tunnel washer. This works on 2 minute cycles and delivers loads to the dryer every 20 minutes.

In addition to the main wash area, the laundry has a recovery section to deal with heavy soiling and here experienced staff decide which items simply need a re-wash and which need a special recovery program.

In the finishing section there are six production lines. A Weir 37 feeder fronts a small-piece line that handles pillowcases and napkins in six lanes. Here the output is around 2,000 pieces/hour on napkins or 1,500/hour on pillowcases.

Another line, fed by a three-station Weir Vacfeed 29, is devoted to sheets. This uses automatic clamps and a feeder-spreader and has an output of 450pieces/hour. The company also has a line devoted to Oxford-style pillowcases, which have a wide border and therefore have to be hand-fed onto the Weir 27 at a rate of around 750pieces/hour.

Weir folding equipment employed at Bates' Leyton plant includes a 64 with built-in 12-stacker, the Weir 55, and a towel folder, which is fully automatic and detects the size and shape of each item.

In the main section, the 55 is singled out as a particularly sophisticated machine that produces a very high quality finish and handles all folds within the body of the machine. It can handle a variety of items, including duvet covers, sheets and even pillowcases.

It also incorporates the WISE (Weir Intelligent Systems Electronics) controller, a recent innovation from H J Weir.

This advanced control can incorporate 32 machine programs and also has production and diagnostic tools, all of which can be accessed by a touchscreen.

WISE is regarded as an especially important development and it is certainly one that is valued by Bates of London. Matthew Pantlin says it has allowed the company to have a very high degree of control and is much more sensitive than its predecessors.

He stresses that his company has always been keen to move with suppliers as their machines develop and evolve.

For example, Bates was one of the first customers to take the Vacfeed 29 when it was introduced and is currently looking at the latest evolution of this machine. The low-line 29 has the feeding stations in a



SOPHISTICATED: The Weir 55 folder is a highly sophisticated piece of equipment that produces all the folds within the body of the machine giving a precise result

INTELLIGENT CONTROL: The WISE control is an "intelligent" system with touchscreen access. It's highly sensitive and gives "real control" says Matthew Pantlin

position that allows operators to work more ergonomically.

Bates favours specific suppliers for certain types of equipment. Weir is one such favoured supplier: "We would always look to them for folding equipment and also for feeders in specific applications," says Matthew Pantlin and he adds that three of the six feeders have been supplied by Weir. In all, Bates has 14 fourteen Weir machines at Leyton and 25 within the group.

One reason favouring H J Weir is that the company is one of the few UK manufacturers still operating. This has a distinct advantage. It's in line with Bates' strong belief in a green policy, as it reduces the laundry's air-miles and both equipment and spares can be delivered quickly and easily.

Matthew Pantlin also finds that H J Weir is very easy to deal with. Apart from the logistic advantages, Weir provides a good support service with regular visits in addition to those under the terms of the service contract.

The similarities of the two companies' values are another point in favour. Both are firmly committed to an environmental policy from an ethical and from a practical viewpoint.

Where possible, Weir has always tried to reduce energy consumption and has also recently implemented a specific policy of trying to reduce its carbon footprint. At the Bates' group, Matthew and David Pantlin have looked at all aspects of production where moves can be made to help both the environment and costs.

"When purchasing equipment, we always look at the machine's energy efficiency," says David Pantlin.

Summing up, David Pantlin says that, like his own company, H J Weir is a family concern and everybody is passionate about the business. "I like their equipment, it does what it says on the packet." **LCN**

AUTOMATED: The Vacfeed 29 is a fully automated sheet feeder with three stations and Bates was one of the first customers to introduce this system to its laundry. The machine is seen here in the latest low-line version