

The Region's Leading Cleaning Industry Magazine

# CLEAN

MIDDLE EAST

VOLUME 13  
ISSUE 11

DECEMBER 2020

A hand is holding a stack of folded towels in a hotel room. The stack consists of several towels, with the top one being white and the others being grey. The background shows a bed with white linens and a window with blue curtains.

**INTERVIEW:**  
Sutharson Sathaiah,  
Global Village

**FEATURE:**  
The Future of Touchless  
in Cleaning

**Rent-A-Towel**  
MAKING A CASE FOR LINEN RENTAL



# LINEN RENTAL ALL THE WAY!

Nothing says hospitality like a crisp, clean, freshly made bed, and pristine towels. However, what one hardly addresses out here are the challenges involved in linen management.

While there are many crucial factors and cost centers involved when it comes to operating a laundry and linen service, it is important to note that without quality textiles and linens, there is no service! And if the textile product doesn't last long as it is used and processed, customer satisfaction could drop and linen costs will eventually increase.

In comes Linen Rental – a trend that has been doing its rounds for a few years now in the region. It has to a large extent helped hotels provide a long and sustainable service option. Exploring this trend, *Clean Middle East* talks to **Narayanan Raghavan, Chief Executive Officer; Ram Mohan, Chief Strategy Officer; and Hari Kesavan, Chief Digital Officer Rent-A-Towel (RNT)**, a pioneering linen rental service in Dubai, on how the hospitality industry can achieve sustainable linen practices.

#### Going the rental way

Image is truly everything for a hotel and the quality of the room

and the linen plays a crucial role in maintaining that image. According to research by *Berendsen UK*, a staggering 96% of people would be less likely to return if their bed linen and towels are stained or of poor quality, with 95% stating that they would tell others about their bad experience.

With so many options available in the market, a key question that comes into any hospitality professional's mind is why go the rental way? RNT, who is also the co-founder of TRSA Middle East Chapter, conducted its research with 100 hotels in the region. The research showed that the market

has started leaning towards linen rental to manage the operation costs and infection-related challenges.

Linen inventory and management is a huge part of this success, says Narayanan. By establishing RNT, Narayanan says that they aim to fill a significant gap for the four L's of housekeeping: linen, laundry, logistics, and labour. "Linen rental has proven to be the perfect solution to sustainably deliver dependable and cost-effective advanced linen management solutions that help hotels achieve higher occupancy, better room revenues, and optimal guest satisfaction," adds Ram.

With a background in hospitality and technology for over 20 years, the founders – Narayanan, Hari & Ram – aim to innovate on the traditional model of hotel housekeeping by eliminating unorganised processes and introducing digital technology to increase efficiency. In short, Narayanan says that by going the linen rental way hotels will be able to focus on the core of their business operations, and more importantly, on creating a phenomenal experience for your guests.

**The pandemic effect!**

The pandemic did accelerate the adoption of this trend. The hospitality business is one of the most affected businesses during the pandemic. The occupancy level has dropped drastically hence maintaining the same level of operational cost is not viable for hotels to run the business. "This industry is dealing with a double-edged sword, on one side the revenue has dropped and on another side compliance requirement related to hygiene has gone up from local authorities, mainly in terms of linen processing," says Ram. He goes on to explain how the

traditional way of buying and processing the linen will not work for the hospitality industry due to budget constraints. And looking at the current market, one can safely say that the hoteliers have realised that the best way to manage this is to outsource the linen management to Linen Rental companies like Rent-A-Towel.

The organisation provides eco-friendly anti-microbial linen (Dr. Linen) and processes the linen at "Hygienically Clean" certified laundries, certified by TRSA ME. With a belief in innovation, transparency, and commitment, RNT says that by using their products and services, one needn't spend tons of cash to continually buy inventory for rooms or fix/upgrade age-old laundry equipment. "The convenient long-term or short-term contracts that we offer allows the clients to pay only for the linen they use, including collection delivery," adds Narayanan.

**Maintaining brand image**

When it comes to going the rental way, there is a question of maintaining the brand image. However, Narayanan says that

their experience in the hospitality business has enabled them to tackle these challenges. "Our innovative linen products can be customised to match the exact needs for fabric, weave, thread count, and more of the client's brand requirements," Ram adds. And by adapting linen rental, the housekeeping can see a transformation in their operations as RNT ensures they meet these requirements:

- Unique demands are always met.
- Premium quality comes with high standards.
- Certified and reliable industry expertise.
- The persistent emphasis on cleanliness.
- Seamless materials management.
- Guaranteed savings for the future.

As a result of this, Narayanan says that he has observed that the equilibrium in the hotel's supply and demand for quality linen is met. There is no single point of failure and one can easily manage their inventory and logistics. And, provide the



(L)Narayanan Raghavan, CEO; (C)Hari Kesavan, Chief Digital Officer  
(R)Ram Mohan, Chief Strategy Officer

highest safety standards. “It’s a simple ripple effect to all parts of housekeeping. By adapting the linen rental practice, housekeepers will be able to ensure that their guests have a five-star experience and at the same time provide the team with the tools to do the job exceptionally. The brand image will automatically elevate in no time,” Narayanan adds.

### Going digital

Digitisation in the region’s laundry sector is fairly new compared to other industries. However, there is a lot of scope for it to have a long-term impact on the industry. The laundry business in this region is US\$ 3 billion but it is an unorganised segment. Digitisation is the best way to manage in terms of linen life & discard, inventory & logistics, count & track of linen, etc. “Digitisation will bring transparency between the laundry and the customers. It will also bring operational efficiency for the laundries to manage the operational costs and assure quality,” says Hari.

Billing is a nightmare today. Hoteliers pay the bill based on the count provided by the laundry and there is no scientific method of assuring the accuracy of the count. “Digitisation can bring this transparency and help customers pay for what they use. The customer dashboard will be able to provide analytics and provide data in terms of occupancy versus linen usage. This will help them have control over laundry costs,” says Hari.

A popular innovation that has already made its way into the region is RFID Technology. This has now evolved and the cost of the tags has reduced. Each piece of linen could be fitted with RFID tags to manage the life and movement of the linen. This will avoid linen being mixed up with other properties and provides



peace of mind to customers and their guests.

To tackle that challenge, RNT introduced the loTowel Platform that manages all the above efficiently and orchestrates the services between the properties and the laundries. “Using our digital technology to manage housekeeping operations can increase room reservations and cut down time spent on manual updates—like tracking your linen’s whereabouts. It’s simple to use, offering complete transparency with real-time data about availability, utilisation, and billing,” adds Hari.

“In today’s era, customers can track the delivery of the pizza using the an App but unfortunately, housekeepers have no clue in terms of delivery of the linen till it arrives at the property. Logistics is completely in the hand of laundries and there is no digitisation for logistics management. Timely readiness of the room is important for the revenue of the hotels and it depends on the arrival of the linen. The days of having the luxury of having 5 PARs (Per-Available-Room) will not be there anymore,” explains Hari.

### TRSA vision

Rent-A-Towel is the co-founder of TRSA ME along with TRSA, US. This is the first chapter outside of the USA for TRSA. Initially, Rent-A-Towel became a member of TRSA US in 2019 to assure the hygiene of linen service to its customers. Later keeping the whole region in mind, Rent-A-Towel and TRSA, USA have jointly announced TRSA ME in 2020 to certify laundries of Rent-A-Towel, partners of Rent-A-Towel, and any other laundries in the region.

“Our vision is to certify all our laundries and partner network with “Hygienically Clean Hospitality”. The certification reflects our commitment to best management practices (BMPs) and our dedication to compliance and processing linens and garments using BMPs. Any certified partners will automatically be eligible to service Rent-A-Towel and its customers which assures committed business for the laundries. TRSA ME certified laundries will become the largest aggregated laundries to service customers in this region. Any properties in this region will be serviced by the closest laundry and avoid any single point of failure.

Thus ensure hygiene, quality, and delivery. We are committed to helping the laundry industry in the region achieve greater heights in terms of revenues and delivering quality to its customers,”

**The verdict**

Upon speaking to two prominent housekeepers in the UAE, it proved that linen rental has given them that stress-free and the extra nudge to focus on their core services! **John Manohar, Cluster Executive Housekeeper, J5 Hotels**, says that whether it is a 3-star, 4 star, or 5-star property the problem always lies in the linen management. “You must be aware that the complete western world works on the linen have a rental with rental linen. That means the hoteliers do not hold any stocks of managing the linen and they simply outsource it to the textile rental companies to manage the complete linen solution. So, in this part of the world, the idea of introducing linen rental came into existence five years ago and we tried to work with professional rental companies in this UAE for the last two years. Since we started working with these professional service providers we do not face any problems in managing the linen because the complete linen inventory is managed by them and

the specifications of the linen and the standards of the linen are all at par with global standards and increase in quantity as and when needed due to seasonal demands is all met by the linen rental provider and we don't face any problems in operations. Therefore, the traditional methods are now all getting away because the cost of operating these facilities and managing people is becoming very high and unaffordable for any hotel operations,” explains Manohar.

**Renzil Colaco, Cluster Executive Housekeeper, Rove Hotels**, started going the linen rental way in 2016 and there has been no looking back since then. “Linen Rental has enabled me to maintain the inventory cycle in a much better manner. As an operator, we may not be buying linen regularly but we often find linen missing as guests tend to take them, or damage them, or even stain them, and we will have to remove it from the inventory. But when it comes to replenishing the inventory most often the operator doesn't want to spend that amount again. That's where Linen Rental has helped by managing all this and more for the housekeepers,” adds Colaco.

When it comes to using the services at RNT, both of them have

said that the organisation has been extremely prompt and has met the standards of the respective hotels they are associated with. Colaco, who started using RNT's services when they wanted to have other suppliers catering to their various properties. So with the opening of Rove La'Mer property, we had certain specifications and requirements as it is the first beach property for the brand. And that's when RNT came into the picture as they fit the bill perfectly. And we have been very satisfied with them so far,” adds Colaco.

Manohar on the other hand has been using RNT services for the last 5 years and has not been disappointed either. He is impressed with their growth and the quality they provide. “Since they also have the TRSA certification requirements they are taking the laundry industry in this region to the next level by bringing in the best practices. They have also developed their digital platform along with a mobile app to orchestrate all the services that are needed for running the housekeeping function in the hospitality industry. So, they stand out from the crowd and they provide 100% professionally driven service to this industry,” says Manohar.●

