

Apparelmaster's Automation Station



New kit for Pryors Apparelmaster

Pryors Apparelmaster has been in business since 1953, part-owner and Managing Director Brett Homan has been with the company for 16 years, during which time he has seen a lot of change.

Brett says, "When I joined the company we had just moved into our current premises as we had outgrown our last site. We knew we had room to expand here and update our processes in line with new technology which was coming onto the market."

However, automation didn't happen over night, in fact it's been a long time in the planning and has been rolled out over a number of years. During the early days, the commercial laundry facilities at the site were functional but fairly rudimentary, with giant washing and drying machines, and all items being processed manually.

The first step towards automation happened 11 years ago, with the installation of a CBW (Continuous Batch Washer) machine. The massive piece of equipment contains 9 different sections for washing garments, and can be programmed per section based on the type of garment being cleaned. For example, food uniforms require different chemicals and water temperatures compared to heavy duty overalls for engineers.

The CBW machine offers several benefits, including efficiencies in water usage. Each section requires 8-10 litres of water per load rather than previous equipment which needed 30-40 litres. This has led to significant costs savings and is more environmentally friendly. An additional energy efficient feature is that waste rinse water is funnelled to the mat washing machine and is used to clean up to 180 kg of commercial and industrial mats per load, saving 20% on water.

At a glance - Pryors Apparelmaster

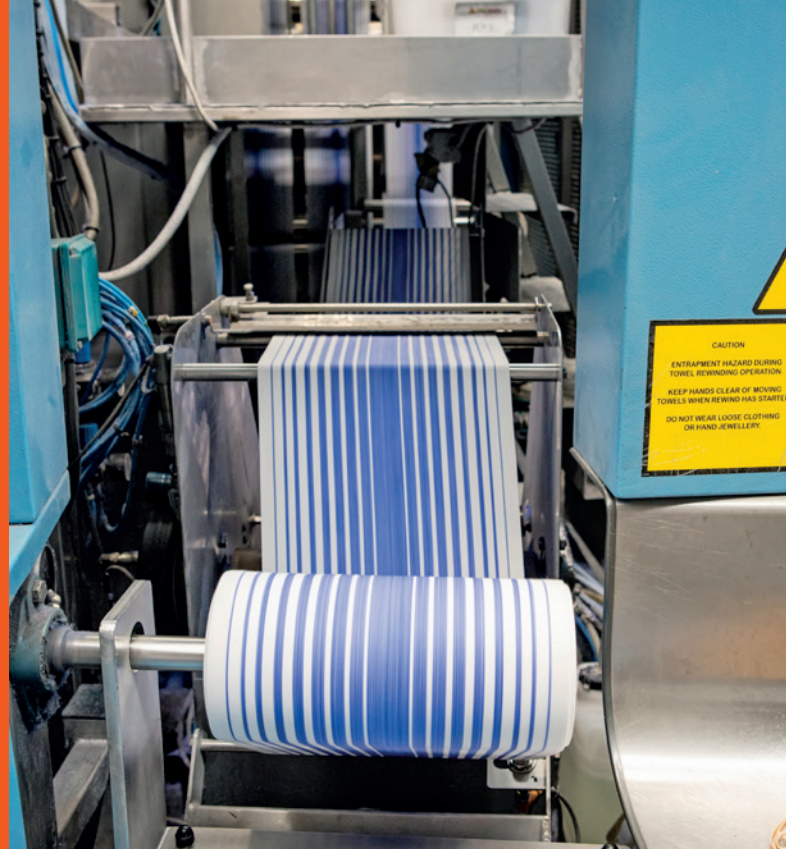
- Established in 1953
- Working hours Monday to Friday 6.30 am until 4.30 pm
- 42 staff
- Fleet of 10 vehicles
- 35-40 tonnes of laundry processed every week
- Clients include: Nestlé, Hire Pool, George Western Foods (Tip Top), Hellers



New fit-out on a roll

Approximately 6 years ago, Pryors Apparelmaster installed a Revolution roller towel processing machine. Brett reflects, "Roller towels are increasingly popular with our customers due to the recycling and environmentally friendly nature of the product. We now process between 5,000-7,000 roller towels a week. The benefits of the Revolution machine include reduced water usage along with thermal and chemical sanitisation on every square inch of towel."

Within 2 years of the roller towel cleaning machine installation, Brett had invested in an automated soil bag system. Bags of dirty laundry are weighed, automatically lifted and directed to a machine which has been set to the correct chemical and temperature for that load. This was followed by the clean bag system, where washed garments are automatically collected and lifted through to the clean side of the plant, ready to go through the drying tunnel.



Totally automatic

Around 6 months ago, the company embarked on a new project, investing \$2.5 million in hardware that would fully automate the plant. It was a huge commitment by the owners in order to gain cost efficiencies and grow the business.

Partnering with Böwe NZ Ltd, who supply Kannegiesser equipment, the latest addition to the plant involved a 12-month planning and design process. The 3-month installation period occurred outside of business hours and at weekends to avoid downtime. Kannegiesser supplied and built a mezzanine floor for the storage and selection function.

An integral part of the new equipment is a ceiling carousel which sees literally thousands of garments flying around the plant, on microchipped hangers. Each microchip contains data from the scanned bar code on each piece of workwear, detailing the customer and the individual wearer. Each garment is stored in a clean dry area, and when a delivery is required, the system automatically pulls out the items ready to be folded and dispatched.



For Brett, the benefits of automation are clear to see, he comments "Without a doubt, automation has improved the overall efficiencies of the plant. We no longer have bottle necks at the select and dispatch part of the operation, as everything is now streamlined and can be processed at the touch of a button. We've also seen efficiencies across the business in terms of labour and overheads, while at the same time, making our processes more environmentally friendly."

Brett is delighted that his team has embraced the new technology saying, "Contrary to popular misconceptions about automation replacing personnel, we have had no redundancies, and in fact we have taken on an extra member of staff. An additional benefit is that the job is now less physical for the team working on the plant floor and they still have plenty of energy when they leave at the end of their shift."

With this automation, Pryors Apparelmaster now has the capacity to increase processing volumes from the current 40 tonnes to 70 tonnes of laundry a week. Brett and his team are therefore focused on growing the business, whilst continuing to provide high quality workwear and workplace rental and laundry solutions.

