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A pitch to keep public restrooms clean, green

By Mark Holan, Times Correspondent
In Print: Monday, September 28, 2009

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Juan "Paco" Zamora markets touch-free public restroom fixtures and no-touch indoor pressure washing and vacuum cleaning.

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Providing fixtures for public restrooms and keeping them sanitary isn't the world's most glamorous line of work. But we're all relieved to find one when we need it and hope the place isn't a nasty breeding ground for germs. • With swine flu and other superbugs threatening public health, HyGen Worldwide is marketing itself as a one-stop shop for touch-free toilets, urinals, sinks, soap dispensers and hand driers — even hands-off restroom doors and lighting. The company also sells a no-touch indoor pressure washer and vacuum cleaning system. • Founded in 1962 as Dust Control Services of Puerto Rico, the company expanded to Spain in the 1970s, France in the 1980s and Hungary in 2006. The first U.S. mainland office opened in Tampa in October 2007 and has four of the company's 110 worldwide employees. • Juan B. "Paco" Zamora, 78, founder and president of the company, said HyGen has about \$10 million in annual sales worldwide. He spoke with the *Times* last week at his Tampa office.

What's the sales pitch?

We are the only company that sells all these products in one place. We buy the best available equipment from different manufactures all over the world and combine everything into a no-touch system.

We have waterless urinals that save an average of 40,000 gallons of water per year and eliminate splashing on the floor. The automatic toilet flushing system is adjusted to use just 0.8 gallons of water if you are there less than a minute (typically for urination) and 1.6 gallons if you are there longer. It saves about 50 percent of the cost of water for these purposes. The cost of the investment is offset by the savings of water in one year or less.

The Kaivac cleaning machines cost from \$3,785 to \$4,200 and can save from \$7,000 to \$10,000 a year in

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labor costs and chemicals by reducing the man hours to keep the facilities clean. The most important thing is the cleanliness — that you are using clean water instead of spreading around contaminated water with a mop.

How does this system reduce the chance of getting sick?

Restrooms are biohazardous waste transfer stations, where cross-contamination is more likely to occur, especially with children. First, the user does not have to touch anything, not even the doors. Because the Kaivac cleaning system uses clean water, it significantly reduces bacteria. The current cleaning methods that are being used are 100 years old and do nothing but transfer bacteria from one place to another.

When you see a restroom cleaned with a Kaivac, the difference in the smell is immediately noticeable. Bacteria create odor. That's why we are offering people a free testing, so they can see the difference before and after.

How is business in Tampa and the U.S. mainland?

We came at a hard time because of the economic situation. On the other hand, the swine flu epidemic should help us. We have sold systems to the Clarion Hotel on Fowler Avenue, the Best Western on Adamo Drive and the InterContinental Hotel in the West Shore area. We have been approved by the InterContinental chain to do other facilities.

We are trying to get going with the schools, principally. We see the concerns about that because of the children. We are also in conversations with restaurant chains in Miami and all over the United States. One of these days, I hope we explode with business.

Who does the installation work?

We subcontract the plumbers and other workers for the fixtures. Most people have their own installers. They have people in house to do the work, which saves them money.

Does any of this equipment have a residential application?

We will probably start residential sales in Puerto Rico in the coming year. It is the testing ground for everything we do. At home, people are not as concerned about contamination the same as in a public restroom, where contamination is a big event. In the home, we will be emphasizing the water savings. There is a lot of water that is wasted when you are shaving or brushing your teeth. And you can save money with the automatic toilet flushing, either 0.8 gallons or 1.6 gallons.

Freelance writer Mark Holan can be reached at newsmark@hotmail.com.

[Last modified: Sep 27, 2009 04:30 AM]

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