

Hi-tech laundry services hit colleges

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At the start of the new academic year, some lucky college students will be able to face the mundane chore of doing their laundry as more high-tech companies compete for their business.

Mac-Gray Corporation and USA Technologies are going online and let students monitor campus laundry equipment, including getting e-mail notices for machine availability and cycle completion.

For many, it's a service that is long overdue.

"This is a great idea just because the laundry situation right now is chaotic with people always throwing your clothes out the moment it finishes and don't care," said Drew Martin, a sophomore at Christopher Newport University in Virginia. "I think that this level of laundry technology would end a lot of frustration and allow more time to be spent doing other things."

The second largest supplier of card and coin-operated laundry facilities management and catering to just over 500 universities, Mac-Gray Corporation will have installed LaundryView at 51 universities since developing the technology in 2003, according to Mac-Gray Chief Operating Officer Neil MacLellan.

LaundryView allows students to check the availability and status of each machine through any device equipped with a Web browser and Internet connection once the laundry facilities are connected to the Internet and the technology installed.

Students will also have the ability to check the graphical two-week history of equipment so that they could avoid peak times as well as specifying where notifications -- by e-mail, cell phone or wireless PDA message -- can be sent when their washer or dryer is available or cycle completed.

In addition, LaundryView enables Mac-Gray to be informed if there is a problem with its machines, which will notify the local branch office, and within minutes a service order is delivered to the appropriate service technician.

According to MacLellan, the technology for the system was especially conducive to today's wireless environment.

"We believe we will more than double with colleges registering for this system by next Labor Day," MacLellan told United Press International.

In fact, he estimates that the service will be affecting about 75,000 resident students this fall alone with the new service at universities including Gettysburg College, Syracuse University and Northeastern University.

However, LaundryView isn't the only laundry Internet tool making waves on college campuses.

USA Technologies, which provides networking for distributed assets and wireless non-cash transactions, among other things, estimates that by fall 2005, 120,000 U.S. college students will be able to use their e-Suds online laundry services.

Managed by distribution partners Caldwell and Gregory Inc. and American Sales Inc., e-Suds enables students to not only go online to see availability of washers and dryers and be notified by e-mail, PDA or

phone, but also use their student ID/one card system to pay for their wash.

Installed at 10 more colleges by this fall that include Rutgers University, American University and Elizabethtown University, it was only a year ago when USA Tech first installed e-Suds at Carnegie Mellon.

"The schools have really embraced the technology," USA Tech's Director of Marketing Wendy Jenkins said, who told UPI that they hope to launch an enhanced laundry online service to multi-housing complexes such as apartments and condominiums in the future. "We're just trying to make a splash in the industry this fall."

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