

Mainline Notes



Our mission:

To provide our customers with the latest technology and most responsive support in the dry-cleaning industry.

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The Compassmax Assembly Assistant: Sophisticated and Practical

By Art Bai

Assembly Assistant, a new innovative CompassMax add-on feature, has been making ripples in the industry ever since its introduction in an early 2009 release. Imagine being able to take advantage of computerized order assembly without the need – or the cost – of an actual automated assembly conveyor. You can easily retrofit your existing assembly area to integrate Assembly Assistant – and chances are, you will be able to reduce the area’s current footprint due to the Assistant’s highly efficient auto-splitting and immediate slot recycling functions. Let’s quickly review the necessary components and principal benefits of this exciting new feature that

is both sophisticated and user-friendly.

Anyone wishing to utilize technology-assisted assembly will need to first consider garment barcoding, which can be done in a variety of ways, using either permanent or temporary barcodes, or a combination of the two (if, for instance, you prefer to not permanently barcode dry cleaned items). Your CompassMax sales or support staff would be glad to discuss the various barcoding strategies and get you started with the necessary media and hardware. For the actual Assembly Assistant, you will of course need a separate computer unit in the assembly area, complete

with a barcode scanner, ticket printer, and a monitor. Most people using Assembly Assistant have installed 24” (or larger) wide-screen monitors with their assembly stations for better visibility throughout the entire assembly bay. As for the physical assembly setup, it is entirely up to you: numbered slots, rail sections, J-hooks, or even manual conveyors can all be utilized.

Using the Assembly Assistant is literally as easy as scanning a barcode. Once a garment is scanned, the screen will show you (in a large, highly visible font) the slot number on which to hang the garment. The system already knows if there are other items within the order, and will assign those items to the same slot once they are scanned. The display is color-coded, and will turn Yellow (“hang the garment in the slot shown”); Green (“order complete, ticket is printing”); or Red (“error: check the screen for the exact problem”). In addition, the full description of the scanned garment, complete with any special instructions, will also come up on the Assembly Assistant screen, along with a running list of garments



Assistant Assembly setup at Best Cleaners, Middletown, CT (photo courtesy of Best Cleaners).

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still waiting to complete the order, and quick links to several critical built-in CompassMax production tools, such as Production or Lot Status and Ticket View.



Assembly Assistant can be used in a centralized plant, or in multiple plant locations. If you choose to do so, you can even have several Assistants running in one plant, so that the dry cleaning assembly can be optionally separate from laundry. Once you have used Assembly Assistant for some time, it is common to turn off the CompassMax ticket printing at the time of mark-in (by individual location or system-wide), since the tickets will now be printed at the time of assembly (any items not intended for automated assembly will still produce a ticket at mark-in).

Keeping true to its trademark efficiency, CompassMax allows you to put as many items as you would like on a ticket at mark-in, and let Assembly Assistant automatically split those items into smaller orders as the items are scanned in the assembly area, based on the maximum number of pieces. For instance, if you put 10 items on an order but your max number of pieces is 3, the first three items

of the order will be automatically split off, creating and printing a new ticket, thus moving the items through assembly quicker and utilizing fewer slots. As soon as the system prints

the ticket for an order and advises you to remove the items from a particular slot, that slot is immediately “recycled” and placed back in the rotation; the system always finds the lowest numbered available slot for each new order that is being assembled, reducing the need for large assembly areas. In fact, most people currently utilizing Assembly Assistant need no more than 100 slots in their assembly bays; most use between 30 and 75.



Training for Assembly Assistant is both easy and fun, and the learning curve is almost instantaneous. Can your assembly staff scan a barcode? Can they look at the screen and place the garment on the slot displayed? Can they collect the ticket and remove the items from the slot if the screen color turns green? If so, they are already qualified to operate Assembly Assistant!

CompassMax users who have taken advantage of this new feature are extremely pleased with the results.

“We installed Assembly Assistant in the shirt department of one of our plants. It worked immediately as expected. With very little training we were assembling shirts more accurately than we had been,” says Norm Ravagnani, Vice President for Finance of Best Cleaners in Middletown, CT. “Assembly Assistant has certainly simplified the process and saved time. We plan to use it in all of our plants.”



Assembly Assistant setup at Munro's Cleaners, Beaumont, TX
(photo by Michael A. Duchaine)

If you are considering computer-assisted assembly, but have been deterred by the significant investment most assembly systems require, or would like a solid stepping stone on your way to a fully automated and self-integrated assembly/bagging system, we at CompassMax would be happy to speak with you about implementing our Assembly Assistant at your facility. We will also gladly answer any questions you may have. Call us at 800-354-2525 to get the process started – your better, faster, more accurate and sophisticated assembly is just a phone call away!

Classic Cleaners: Surviving Hurricane Katrina

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina ravaged the gulf coast states, causing most its damage in the city of New Orleans. Four years later there are still people without homes, and companies that have yet to rebuild their place of business. I spoke with Steve Casso, owner of Classic Cleaners in Harahan, Met-

airie, and Baton Rouge about how his business was affected by the hurricane.

Erin: Were your stores damaged by Hurricane Katrina?

Steve: Our cleaners were on the out-

By Erin Cully

side of New Orleans so we were lucky to only get minor storm damage and flooding. Unfortunately our house sustained \$240,000 in damage with a total loss of our belongings.

Erin: What impact did Hurricane Katrina have on your business?

Steve: It made us rethink how we do things. We had tons of business in the beginning of rebuilding, but we had no employees.

Erin: How long did it take to get your business operational again after the hurricane?

Steve: About three weeks after the hurricane we were able to open. In addition to a lack of employees, they were all paid the new minimum wage of \$10/hr, even for counter help.

Erin: First there was Hurricane Katrina, then the economic downfall. How hard has overall recovery been?

Steve: I found rebuilding after the hurricane tough, but we had plenty of business. The economic downfall is harder for us to deal with. To me you find that life is easier to deal with if you have money coming in, even if you are short handed. One thing the hurricane taught us is that we were too materialistic. Try losing everything you own except the clothes you left town with and coming home to no stores open to purchase more. Your life and your views change.

Erin: Has this given you an opportunity to make changes to the way you run your business?

Steve: The business changes that were made were concentrated on automation. My wife swears that the first robot invented that can press shirts will be ordered immediately!

Erin: This year you upgraded to the latest version of our software, Compassmax V10. Has that had an impact on your business?

Steve: It has simpler features. Everything you need to accomplish is on one page. No more entering numbers every time you make steps through the system. All the great features the old system had, just added more and made easier. The extra feature with the camera taking pictures at mark in was used to settle a dispute today. The customer claimed that bug damage on a sport coat was not there when he brought it in, but we were lucky enough to have pictures to validate they were at mark in.

Erin: You also just added our Assembly Assistant feature. Has

that helped streamline assembly?

Steve: At first the process was slow, doing all the barcodes. Eventually we were in full swing and the Assembly Assistant stopped mismatched clothing and made matching and assembly a lot faster. In fact at the Clean Show we purchased a Sankosha Automatic Bagger. The Assembly Assistant matched the clothes so fast that the bagger was getting frustrated not being able to keep up. People think that all the time is saved on the Assembly Assistant but that is not the case. Using the assistant with barcodes shaves quite a few people off the counter. Once they are barcoded it takes half the time to mark in the next time they are brought in for cleaning. I personally found this is where the most cost saving occurs. Because we focus on quality we did not want to lose people in the back of the plant doing inspections and touch ups.

If you are interested in helping the slow path to recovery in Louisiana and other states, check out www.serv.gov or www.redcross.org for ways you can help. For more information regarding upgrading to Compassmax V10 or the Assembly Assistant, please call 800-354-2525.

Meet Our Staff

My husband and our two sons relocated to Scarborough, Maine from Long Island, NY 15 years ago. After college, I worked in the retail, then catalog and production sectors of the fashion industry in Manhattan.



It was September 2000 when I joined the team at Mainline Computer Systems. As Office Manager, I have the wonderful opportunity to interact with most of our customers, in addition to the many roles I have in contributing to our team approach in helping customers with their Compassmax system.

Although I enjoyed my big city upbringing and all of its offerings, my family and I truly enjoy the small "big city" life here in coastal Maine.

While our boys were in school, I worked part time at a management consulting firm and I also became active in volunteering in the school system and was able to incorporate and put my enjoyment of graphic design and publishing to use. In an effort to be supportive in their school sports activities, I became involved in fundraising, sat on several high school sports boards, and found myself attending the local sporting events then and now the college sporting events.

Cecilia McNaughton

Away from the office, I enjoy gardening, boating and photography. My husband, Ken and I are almost empty nesters, with our older son Stephen working in New York City and our younger son, Andrew, a Senior at Providence College this fall.

Cecilia is a valuable member of the Mainline staff. She works very hard to make sure that all of our customers receive everything they need to operate their computer systems. She also works to support the sales staff, installers and technicians to provide the best possible service for our customers.

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www.compassmax.com



Fort Williams Lighthouse, Cape Elizabeth, ME

SAVE THE DATE: Our next user group meeting, Ocean of Possibilities 2010, will be held on October 8th and 9th, 2010 in Portland Maine. Detailed information will be forthcoming. For early reservations, please contact Nancy Goldstein at 800-354-2525 extension 108.

MAINELINE TECHNOLOGY GROUP

16 Northbrook Drive
Falmouth, Maine 04105

Phone: 800-354-2525
Fax: 207-781-7220
Email: sales@compassmax.com