



Why the difference in pricing when you go to the dry cleaners.

Many consumers are confused about the difference in pricing between dry cleaners throughout the industry. It is important to explain what goes into the pricing structure that you are charged for your dry-cleaned items.

The cost of production starts at the front counter. When you drop off your clothes at the dry cleaners you should consider how they create the invoice and receipt you receive and how they identify your items so that what you brought in is returned to you.

Proper identification includes a complete description of each article indicating the type of item, colour, label identification, and any stains or tears that may be on the garment at the time it was marked in. As well, it is important for the counter person to ask you if there were any spills, such as liquor or soda pop that may have dried and are not readily visible. If there are any and the article of clothes is not pre spotted, then that stain could caramelize in the drying process and may be difficult if not impossible to remove later.

In addition, how the counter person attaches identity tags to the garment is important. Are they using staples, which can rust and transfer to the garment, or applying plastic tags similar to those used in retail stores (these usually cost more to use)? The counter person must check the buttons to see if they are fragile, broken, or must be covered or removed before the cleaning process to prevent breakage or dissolving in the solvent.

The invoice that the information is printed on should be clearly legible and if possible computer printed. If this information is entered into a computer program, it can be readily and speedily available for future searches for locating items in case they go missing. As well computer-generated invoices and tags will provide more information to ensure return of the garment on time. A computer-generated program also costs more to incorporate in the business.

The size of the dry cleaner's operation will probably dictate the kind of care that your garment is to receive when it goes through the dry-cleaning process. Too many cleaners do not distill their solvent after each cleaning process because the cost of the solvent and the detergents is so expensive. They should add new fresh detergent after each distillation process. Because of the cost of these solvents and detergents that are used in the process, dry cleaners may not segregate your garment according to type of garment, colour and material (silk, wool, cotton, etc.). Clothes of different materials should be cleaned separately because they require different wash and drying times. As well, failure to distill and add fresh detergent could result in re-deposition, colour loss, and loss of texture. As well, it is mandatory that these used solvents are disposed of by government licensed carriers to recycling plants. This is also a costly process and unfortunately some operators cheat on this requirement to save money. Knowledgeable, experienced and responsible dry cleaners do not come cheap.

Another major cost factor is the amount of time a dry cleaner takes to inspect and spot garments for stains, check care labels, and properly segregate the garments he is cleaning. Should the garment be dry cleaned, wet cleaned or laundered? Garments should be inspected before and after the cleaning process. The knowledge and care that the dry cleaner has will dictate the wages that this person will earn.

If the dry cleaner provides a shirt laundering and pressing service, the type of equipment he uses can be very expensive. Some dry cleaners launder the shirts and place them on a shirt press and then place it on a hanger. That is the way you get the shirt. Others providing higher quality standards will first iron out creases in the collar and cuffs, as well as underarms. Many shirts are still made with fused collars which cause shrinkage problems for the collars as well as dark stains at the points of the collar. This is because of the poor fusing used in the manufacturing process. A smart dry cleaner will adjust the steam pressure on his heated press which will reduce the temperature and reduce this problem. This is costly to the dry cleaner because he reduces his volume of shirts he can produce as a result of the longer drying time.

The next process that the garment goes through is the pressing department. The cost of hiring an experienced and knowledgeable presser is quite high. He or she must know his materials and how much care the garment requires. If he is ironing out the linings, this is an added cost. The presser must prevent shrinkage and stretching of the garment and has to be careful ironing around buttons and other fancy trims.

The next process is the inspection department where a thorough inspection of the garment should take place. This includes checking for loose, missing, or broken buttons, open seams, hems down, etc. If a button is missing, it should be replaced with a similar matching button. If a hem is down, it should be tacked back and open seams should be sewn up. Proper inspection is a costly process.

The next process is the bagging and packaging department. Packaging costs are at an all-time high. The thickness of the hanger is important to properly hold the garment, as well as the style of hanger. Garments should be hung in such a manner as to make sure the item does not fall off the hanger, stretch out of shape, or leave indent marks on the garment. Tissue is usually necessary to hold the garments shape and prevent dust from falling through the opening at the top of the poly bag that clothes are placed in. Many quality concerned and environmentally concerned dry cleaners provide reusable garment bags (many at no charge to their customers) to cut down on the use of poly bags and tissue which is destined for the garbage. At this stage, the shipper is responsible to check each tag on each garment to make sure it belongs with the accompanying invoice and then attach to the bag.

All the above steps take time and effort as well as additional costs. Therefore there are differences in prices between dry cleaners. It is up to the consumer to decide what he requires and what he is willing to pay for this service. For example, if you possess a very expensive suit, dress, or shirt, are you going to take a chance on a low price dry cleaner to take the care that is required to maintain the shape, colour, texture, and integrity of your garment or are you going to seek that dry cleaner that provides all the necessary processes that are required to do so. For a list of Certified Professional Textile Care Cleaners visit www.fabricare.org and click on "Our Customers"

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