



# Housekeeping

by Lindsay Otto

## Thread count basics every housekeeping manager should know

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! \*\*\*Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.\*\*\* College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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The housekeeping department's main responsibility is to satisfy hotel guests by delivering a clean and comfortable lodging environment both inside and outside of the guestroom. One of the ways to ensure guest satisfaction is to provide guests with an outstanding sleep experience while they are away from home. Utilizing bed linens that appeal to the guests' senses yet which are maintainable and cost effective should be a prime consideration for every housekeeping manager.

### Quality matters

In the past, many hotel operators have purchased the lowest priced linens knowing that they won't last for more than a few months. However, hotels in recent years have begun to purchase better quality sheets with higher thread counts as guests now have a greater demand for a quality sleep experience. Hotels can no longer be successful by merely purchasing the lowest priced sheets. It has become increasingly more important for hoteliers to find a brand and linen type that is cost effective and durable and which delivers comfort to hotel guests. As a general rule of thumb, the higher the linen thread count, the softer and more durable the linens will be, but the acquisition costs will increase as well.

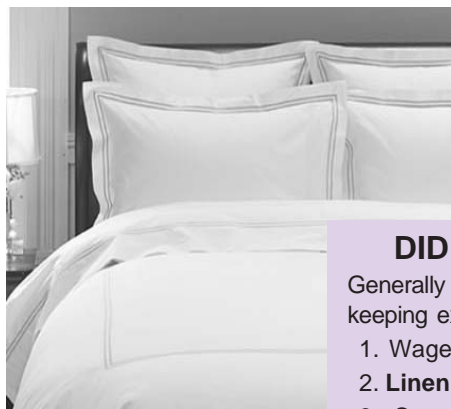
### What is thread count?

Thread count is a unit of measure for the coarseness and fineness of a piece of fabric. Thread counts are measured by counting the amount of threads that are contained in one square inch of fabric. This amount includes lengths and widths of threads in each inch. Thread count is one of the simplest ways to determine quality of a fabric. It has been proven that the thread count of sheets can affect things such as durability, customer satisfaction and cost. Therefore, it is essential to choose linens with the proper thread count.

### Appropriate thread counts

Thread counts can range from 80-700; however, most common sheets have a thread count between 180-320. Keeping in mind that the standard thread count for most linen used for commercial applications is approximately 150, often this standard is not suitable for all type of hotels. Generally, the appropriate thread count level for each classification of hotels, based on industry averages, are as follows:

*Economy-class hotels:* It is no longer acceptable for economy hotels to have sheets with a standard thread count of 150 or lower since consumers are demanding a higher quality sleep experience even at the economy level. Many hotels have upgraded their bed linens to a thread count of 180-200 in order to meet guests' expectations. Microtel Inns and Suites has introduced a new bedding system called "Dream Well." By July 31, 2007 all Microtel beds will be equipped with a triple sheet set of 200-thread count sheets.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Generally the three highest housekeeping expenses for hotels are:

1. Wages and benefits
2. **Linen purchases**
3. Consumable guestroom amenities

*Limited-service and Select-service hotels:* Limited-service and select-service hotels should have sheets with a minimum of 200-thread count. Holiday Inn Express Hotels & Suites recently renovated their bedding with the “Simply Smart Bedding” concept which employs a triple-sheet system with a 200-thread count. Hampton Inn’s new “Cloud Nine” bed sports 200-thread count sheets to complement its new duvet cover. Many Country Inns & Suites by Carlson also utilize 200-thread count linens.

*Full-service hotels:* Full-service hotels should purchase sheets with a thread count between 250 and 280 because they are more comfortable for hotel guests and are generally more durable. The Hilton “Suite Dreams” bedding collection that was implemented in 2005 upgraded their sheet thread count to 250 to continue to satisfy the sleep needs of their guests. Westin Hotel’s Heavenly Bed® offers three crisp sheets ranging in thread count from 180 to 250.

*World-class/Luxury:* World-class/Luxury hotels should be providing their guests with the highest quality bed linens. Their linens should be at least 280-thread count and possibly as high as 400-thread count. While these bed linens are the most expensive, guests are paying a high price to receive a quality experience at a luxury hotel. Ritz Carlton hotels, for example, use 400-thread count sheets. The Park Hyatt Los Angeles uses 300-thread-count Fili d’oro duvets and bed linens while the Park Hyatt Toronto offers 300-thread count Rivolta linens from Italy.

### **Misleading thread counts**

Thread counts that are over 500 are often misleading to buyers. Sheets that claim that they have a thread count over 500 generally use plied yarns. Plied yarns are made by twisting together multiple finer threads. According to the National Textile Association, although linens with high thread counts may have two or three ply yarns, the accepted practice is to count each thread as one even if they are plied. Therefore, a thread count of 600 could simply mean that it was 300-thread count with a double ply, which is not the same as a 600-thread count of a single ply. A higher thread count, such as over 400, isn’t always better despite what some may think. Thread counts that are higher mean the linen is tactually softer; however, it also means that the fibers are thinner and as a result, more delicate. Linens that are more delicate often aren’t as durable and won’t endure wear and tear as long as others. Liz Beresford, owner and operator of “All Bed Linens”, claims that thread counts between 100 and 400 are sufficient and paying for anything more is generally not cost effective.

### **Don’t just focus on thread counts**

When purchasing bed sheets for a hotel it is important to purchase linens with the proper thread count. However, softness and durability also depend on the quality of the fiber itself. Cotton or cotton-blend linens are the most common in providing satisfactory comfort as well as durability. The quality of cotton should be as important in the decision making process as the thread count is. Quality is based on the lengths of the cotton fibers. Longer fibers equal better cotton. Egyptian cotton is claimed to be the longest-fiber and best quality cotton in the world.

It is not essential for every hotel to purchase 100% Egyptian Cotton sheets; however, hotels that are striving to find the highest quality sheets should look for high thread count 100% Egyptian Cotton to provide the ultimate softness for their guests. Pima Cotton is the longest fiber cotton grown in the United States and is smooth and durable. Standard Cotton is also produced in the U.S. and is less expensive then Pima Cotton but slightly less durable.

Cotton-blend sheets and other types of sheets such as satin and silk should be evaluated differently than 100% cotton sheets, as durability and costs may be different. When it comes to durability and stain resistance it is also essential to determine how the products have been finished. Many sheets are treated to be stain resistant and wrinkle free and are able to maintain color brightness. Because of the high investment costs associated with bed linens, it is essential for housekeeping managers to consider all of these factors in addition to thread count when making final purchase decisions. ✧

*(Lindsay Otto is an undergraduate student in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Niagara University. This article was researched and presented as part of her honors course of study. Comments or questions may be emailed to: [editor@roomschronicle.com](mailto:editor@roomschronicle.com).)*