

# Game Changer: Ultra-Soft Carpet

By: Steve Santrizos

If you haven't heard of it yet, you will soon. It's the fastest growing innovation in carpet manufacturing since Marco Polo returned from the east with woven rugs made of silk. Acceptance of this new style of carpet is overwhelming. Consumers love the softness. The first time I touched it I had a desire to take off my shoes and socks and sink my bare feet into its extravagance. But understand, the days of 'just any old vacuum cleaner will do' are over!

While impressively luxurious, these new ultra-soft carpets can take extra care to clean. Be forewarned! Many traditional cleaners are virtually impossible to push across this carpet. The carpet is so soft that most upright vacs 'sink in' and the vacuum locks to the floor like one big 120 volt suction cup. Fear not! Armed with the proper cleaner these carpets are easy to vacuum.



The trend toward softer carpet started a few years ago. Demand and manufacturing have now exploded. When ultra-soft carpet was first introduced manufacturers targeted the top of the market and the product carried a high price. This trend is now shifting. Manufacturers are introducing soft carpets at lower price points utilizing cheaper materials in lighter weights. Therefore a concern that was once reserved for extravagant residences can be and will now be found in more modest homes.

The introduction of softer yarns in carpeting has led to the re-use of an old industry term 'denier' and DPF (denier per filament) to quantify softness. Denier is a numeric calculation for yarn. The 'denier' of a fiber is the weight in grams of 9,000 meters of yarn. The larger the denier, the thicker the yarn. DPF represents the size of an individual filament that makes up yarn. The lower the DPF, the softer the fiber. Carpets used in homes have traditionally had a DPF of 12-18. Commercial carpets can have a denier as high as 22. As the demand for softer residential carpets has grown, the DPF has dropped. The new ultra-soft carpets sold today have a DPF of 3.5 to 4.5.

That means a typical strand of yarn made from the new super-soft fibers has 3-4 times as many filaments as its predecessors. Traditionally a strand of yarn might have 120 filaments. Compare that to 700+ filaments in a strand of ultra-soft carpet yarn. Here is where the 'challenge to clean' concept starts making sense. With 3+ times more filaments there is more surface area. More surface area creates more drag. More drag makes a vacuum nozzle harder to push and pull. More surface area makes it harder to pull air through the carpet. This creates more vacuum lock-down. More surface area/drag makes brushrolls bog down and even stop.

To make matters even more challenging, carpet manufacturers are 'beefing up' their ultra-soft carpets. A few years ago a carpet with 50-60 ounces of yarn per square yard was considered lavish. There are new Super-Soft carpet introductions with 100 ounces of fiber! The introduction of less expensive ultra-soft fibers (not nylon) means that there will be very reasonably priced 60 and 70 ounce ultra-soft carpets on the market very soon.

Most carpet manufacturers are now selling soft carpet. The 2 biggest carpet manufacturers, Shaw and Mohawk, report brisk sales of their soft carpet. Both companies report that they are receiving calls from consumers about vacuums and vacuuming.

You need to be prepared! Do you know if the vacuums you are recommending are reasonably easy to push/pull across ultra-soft carpet? But ease of use is only half of 'it'. If these vacuums are easy to push, do you know if they are really cleaning? After-all, 'cleaning', is what we are selling!

Both Mohawk and Shaw have basic recommendations for what to look for in a vacuum cleaner. They recommend that consumers consider choosing cleaners with the following features:

- Adjustable Vacuum Motor Speed
- Brushroll Height Adjustment
- Switchable (on/off) Brushroll
- Efficient Air-Flow (no Sealed Suction)
- 'Not too aggressive' Bristles
- Adequate Wheel Size
- Light-Weight
- Adjustable Brush Motor Speed



And let's not forget about the potential of harming the appearance of the carpet! Carpet manufacturers consider vacuuming the single most important step in the care of carpet. They state that soil, if allowed to remain in the carpet, may abrade the fibers due to the sharp edges of many soil particles. Also, cleaners with overly aggressive

brushrolls adversely affect a carpet's appearance. The term 'appearance retention' popped up several years ago. CRI now tests for it.

The professionals at Wessel-Werk have taken a proactive approach to cleaning ultra-soft carpet. This is why Wessel-Werk has introduced Soft-Clean™ by Wessel-Werk®. Products with the Soft-Clean label have been designed to clean soft carpet with ease. Wessel has considered all aspects of the process of cleaning soft carpet. Wessel-Werk is planning a new generation of Soft-Clean nozzles. While the ease of pushing a cleaner across soft carpet is important, so is actually cleaning the carpet! Wessel is also studying how to best clean and brush these carpets without degrading the appearance.



**SOFT-CLEAN™**  
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Initial tests of the first generation of Wessel Soft-Clean nozzles push 75% easier and clean 54% better than similar nozzles without Soft-Clean Technology. Soft-Clean Electric Brushes are currently available on canister vacuums and central vacuums.

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*Steve Santrizos is Vice President and General Manager of Wessel-Werk USA.*

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