

# The Business of Clean

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**T**here are a number of service models in the vehicle care industry. The principles, business techniques, ideas, and rules that make up these business models varies with the mindset and needs of your customer base. Providing customers with exceptional services is the only way you can profit from the business game. You need to know and use proper customer service tools to sustain and grow your business.

It takes a collaborative effort to deliver a clean, dry car in a timely, cost-effective manner to a satisfied customer. The carwash is part utility and part show. Nearly all of the customers descending on your wash look forward to spending minimal time on a mundane chore. They have chosen your location for one reason or another. None of them appreciate that fully.

Operators spend countless hours at the wash and can lose track of what a good operation should look like. When the car count is high, it is easy to give the impression you are only there to take the money and run. Maybe your customers aren't always composed of wide-eyed consumers, but they should be.

If they are repeat customers, the small annoyances of poor service build up. Fashion dictates speedy is in, but don't let busy, sunny days transcend into something crazier than a game show. You may make it work for a little while, but you can't fool the public forever. They will eventually decide your wash is not all it's cracked up to be.

No matter how well established your business is, you cannot grow if your customers are either not happy with you or the services. Do not overestimate the loyalty of your customers and give them reasons to toss your address permanently. Try looking through their eyes, know what you have and try to pin down what it is about your location they ought to be appreciating.

Implementing a proactive business strategy can help you minimize issues. Be acutely aware of the competitive landscape and the market you are trying to serve. Exploring the issues of your customers help you understand their mindset and expectations. Finding

smarter ways to manage those issues and aligning your vision to fit the demographics are the best ways to provide customers with the quality they expect from you.

Oh, the torturous foible that makes building or remodeling a car wash notorious. Deal falling through once? Check. Planning department turning up countless flaws? Check, Check and Check..... Waiting for months on word from the bank? Check.

But the only way out is through. Make good decisions so the other side makes you grateful for whatever got you there. After you define your priorities and identify the factors most important to you, use other resources to narrow down your choices.

Technology allows us to aggregate inspiration, trends and half-thoughts and shape them into a practical agenda. It has leveled the playing field for smaller businesses that want to compete with the larger ones. In contrast, it has also accelerated the degree of uncertainty every business owner has to live with.

First and foremost, know and understand the components and capabilities within your system. Choose simple, reliable components over complication and glitz.

Maintaining simplicity is deceptively difficult and humans have a natural tendency to drift toward complexity. But remember, designs that are harder to understand create forced downtime and costly replacements, which are an expensive way to operate.

The wash process must accommodate a wide variety of vehicles and still be adjustable to meet specific needs. Every vehicle will not clean and dry equally well; therefore choose equipment with the greatest impact on the largest number of vehicles. Operating smartly will control costs plus boost revenue.

Great design is the great equalizer. It allows small companies to snatch business from giant competitors.

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People should have no tolerance anymore for bad design. Good design is essential to good business. For a design to succeed, it has to do two things: it must solve a problem in a unique way, and it must "surprise" us.

Appearances do matter and before signing the deal, decide to put in the hard work that keeps up those appearances. If the facility and its equipment are grungy, the customer will perceive a high standard of service as improbable. Given the nature of the business – removing grime – customers can make allowances for some facility imperfections; however, they can spot apathy and that translates to poor service. There truly is something disconcerting about a vehicle (whether you are in it or not) disappearing into the murky light of a disgusting tunnel and then believing it will emerge sparkly shiny. Ambiguous at best.

Spending hard-earned money is painful; that does not make you money obsessed nor are you a modern day Scrooge. You have to face the reality on costs - to some extent it's all money out the door, either now or later. Choosing equipment wisely does not mean giving up your safety and security causing you the vertigo of a tightrope walker without a safety net.

Your biggest challenge is to narrow down the possibilities to find things that can be executed and then people that can execute them. The right vendors are integral to the effort. Surround yourself with people who have heart and conscience. If they can demonstrate belief in what they stand for as an enterprise - and are willing to admit vulnerability - you have a chance of coming out the right way with that vendor supplier.

Vendor Suppliers: Whomever you choose, you must trust them, like them and allow their persuasion - but not to the extent they remove the thrills and challenges of running your own business. Likewise, vendors need to demonstrate they are relaxed, elevated and engaged in your success. Those who know the terrain will have their own strong network and verifiable reputation within the industry, and that should be their key attraction.

An all-or-nothing "package deal" on an entire system may not be a deal after all. Maybe it is. Maybe it's Not. While following a common theme, wash facilities are like

fingerprints - no two are alike. Every facility is unique, calling for alternate chemical and equipment picks. A requirement for an owner to buy everything, start to finish, in a pre-determined package, is a terrific choice for those who are not spending their own money.

There are a number of independent companies in this industry who manufacture excellent products, which complement all brands. These products integrate seamlessly and bolster your business strategy. Sorting through these products will insure the needs of your specific operation are addressed. Connecting the dots early go a long way to providing synergy throughout the entire process and will aid in achieving maximum uptime and profit.

Wash performance can be enhanced or impeded by the cast of characters involved in the production. Continued observation of the process and the willingness to make adjustments go a long way to improve overall results and ultimately your customer's satisfaction. In this business, presentation is everything and a clean, well-planned and maintained facility frames the re-introduction of an improved vehicle to its owner.

The customer should be in awe of not only the end product, but also of your operation. The obvious things at your facility are aesthetic, but that's not all of it. Friendly, efficient washes delivered in a clean, organized manner trump amusement park glitz any day. It's not hard to love a clean car, but if you need to jumpstart the sense of wonder in your customers, make it inviting to visit your premises. So, demonstrate your sense of irrepressible pride by tapping the resources available. Informed decisions are a direct reflection on you and equal smooth sailing operationally. Continue to be inspired - and a little bit haunted- by your wash's dance with mortality. Hopefully, your wash will be successful; the best example of exceptional business practices that appreciative customers will ever have the privilege of knowing.

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