

# CONNECT the dots to PROFITS

How the right resources  
can shape your investment.

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A number of service models are available in the vehicle care industry. The principles, business techniques, ideas and rules that make up these business models vary with the mindset and needs of a customer base.

Providing customers with exceptional services is how car care companies can profit from the business game. Owners and operators need to know and use proper customer service tools to sustain and grow their businesses.

## Consider customer satisfaction

A collaborative effort is needed to deliver a clean, dry car in a timely, cost-effective manner to a satisfied customer. The carwash is part utility and part show. Most customers visiting a carwash look forward to spending minimal time washing their vehicles. They troll their neighborhoods and decide to frequent a specific location for one reason or another.

The truth is, 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 to customers that the wash is only there to take their money.

Moreover, for repeat customers, the small annoyances of poor service can build up. Trends dictate speediness is in; but don't let busy, sunny days transcend into something crazier than a game show. An owner or operator may

make it work for a little while, but this most likely will not appease consumers forever. They will eventually decide that the carwash is not all it's cracked up to be.

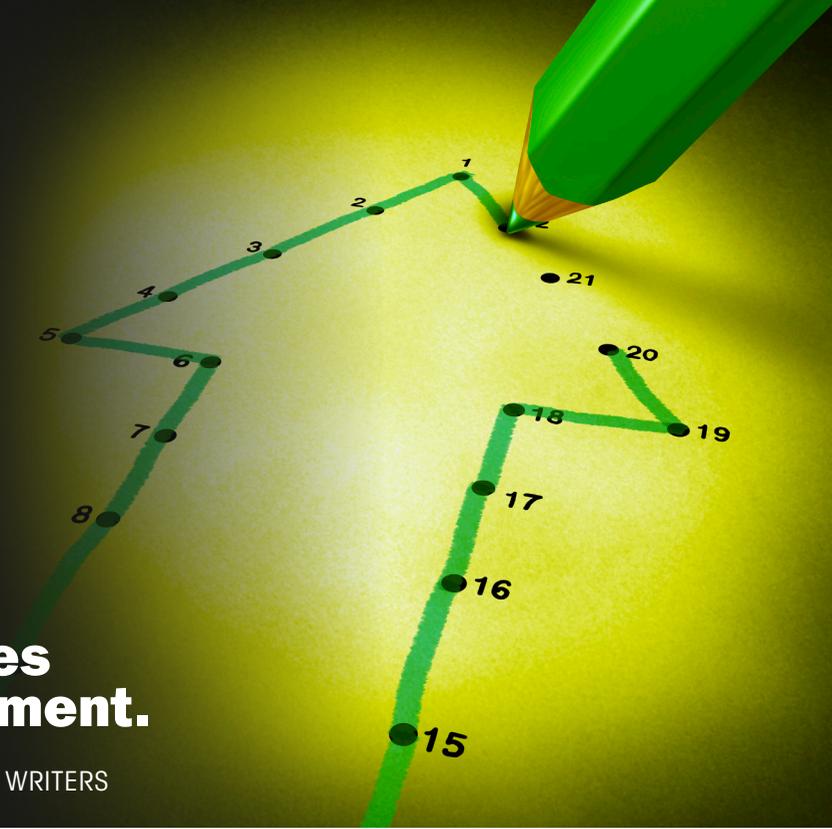
No matter how well established your business is, you can't grow if customers are unhappy with your wash, or if the services they need are not being provided. Do not overestimate the loyalty of your customers and give them reasons to not come back to your location.

While time is still left on the clock, try looking through your customers' eyes. Know what you have, and what you still need, and try to pin down what it is about your location they may appreciate.

## Be proactive

No one can provide flawless services, but implementing a proactive business strategy can help minimize issues. Be acutely aware of the competitive landscape and the market you are trying to serve. Exploring the issues of customers can 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.

Building or remodeling a carwash can be a daunting process. For example, a deal could fall through, a planning commission may require adjustments to your proposal and securing finances could take months. However, the only



way out is through making good decisions. After defining your priorities and identifying the most important factors, utilize quality resources to help narrow down your choices.

## **Understand design and technology**

Technology allows us to aggregate inspiration, trends and ideas 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, technology has also accelerated the degree of uncertainty every business owner has to deal 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. Remember, designs that are harder to understand create forced downtime and costly replacements, which lead to expensive operations.

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

Quality design, whether functional or aesthetic, is the great equalizer. It allows small companies to snatch business from giant competitors. People should not tolerate bad design any longer. 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.

That said, appearances do matter. Before making an important design decision, figure out what hard work will be required to keep 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

*(Concluded on page 53)*

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(Continued from page 51)

can spot apathy, and that translates to poor service.

Something is truly disconcerting about a vehicle (manned or unmanned) disappearing into the murky light of a disgusting tunnel, and then believing it will emerge clean and shiny.

### Spend money to make money

Spending hard-earned money is painful, but that does not make an owner money-obsessed or a modern-day Scrooge. You have to face the reality of costs — to some extent, it's all money out the door, either now or later. Choosing equipment wisely does not mean giving up safety and security.

Your biggest challenge is to narrow down the possibilities to find things that can be executed, and then employ the 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 on top.



Be acutely aware of the competitive landscape and the market you are trying to serve.

You must trust the vendors you choose and allow their persuasion, but not to the extent of removing 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 the key attraction.

An all-or-nothing “package deal” on an entire system may not be a deal after all. While following a common theme, wash facilities are like fingerprints — no two are alike. Every facility is unique, calling for specific chemicals and equipment.

Several independent companies in this industry manufacture excellent products, which complement all brands.

These products integrate seamlessly and bolster your business strategy. Sorting through these products will ensure the needs of your specific operation are addressed.

Connecting the dots early goes a long way to providing synergy throughout the entire process and will aid in achieving maximum uptime and profit.

### Stay inspired

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 can improve overall results and, ultimately, your customers' satisfaction.

In this business, presentation is everything; and a clean, well-planned and maintained facility frames the reintroduction of an improved vehicle to its owner.

The customer should be in awe of not only the end product, but also the overall operation. The obvious things at your facility are aesthetic, but that's not all of it. Friendly, efficient services delivered in a clean, organized manner, in most cases, trump amusement park glitz. It's not hard to love a clean car. However, if you need to jump-start the sense of wonder in customers, make your location inviting

to entice them to frequent your site.

Demonstrate a sense of irrepressible pride by tapping the resources available. Informed decisions are a direct reflection of you and your operations. Continue to be inspired by your wash's dance with possible failure; and, hopefully, your carwash will thrive. Be an example of exceptional services and business practices — your customers will notice. □

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