



# Carwash Sales and Marketing

## The Canadian Car Wash Breakthrough Begins

FOR MUCH OF THE PAST DECADE, TWO COMMON CAR WASH ISSUES HAVE GAINED A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION FROM EXPERIENCED OPERATORS AND RELIABLE SUPPLIERS.

In a much-needed attempt to produce a perfectly clean car, operators and suppliers have significantly improved the cleaning capability of their washes, and have considerably reduced most wash quality issues.

On another notable matter, these two groups also have identified a second critical need, and have worked together diligently to drive down car wash operating costs.

These concerted efforts have produced two measurable and very positive outcomes.

**First**, consumers at professional, commercial washes can fully expect to receive a beautifully clean, shiny, spot-free and dry car.

**Second**, since operators and suppliers have sought to achieve the lowest cost of ownership, most operators have improved their profitability per wash.

Emboldened and encouraged by these two important achievements, the most successful operators and owners in 2016 will advance quickly now to the next level, as they focus intensely over the next six to nine months upon aggressively promoting and marketing their washes.

## TWENTY-SEVEN DIFFERENT REASONS WHY ANY CUSTOMER WOULD VISIT YOUR WASH

### How many of your regular car wash customers might say something like this?

- I wash my car because it is really dirty.
- I wash my car infrequently, and it is always an impulse purchase.
- I wash my car because I have a pre-paid car wash package.
- I wash my car because I am going out of town, or going on vacation.
- I wash my car because the weekend is coming up.
- I wash my car because I have never used this wash before.
- I wash my car because today is my pay day.
- I wash my car to celebrate my birthday.
- I wash my car because I am picking up my in-laws at the airport.
- I wash my car because I have an important meeting in the morning.
- I wash my car because I received a text or email announcement earlier today.
- I wash my car because a clean and shiny car always makes me feel good.
- I wash my car because today is a special day. (i.e., Mother's Day)
- I wash my car because we are going to a wedding tomorrow.
- I wash my car because I have a date with my significant other.
- I wash my car because I could see they weren't very busy.
- I wash my car because I want to get this nasty looking pollen off of it.
- I wash my car because I want to get this terrible looking road salt off of it.
- I wash my car because my car maintains its value better when it is clean.
- I wash my car because I am working with my boss tomorrow.
- I wash my car because I saw an attractive promotion on the reader board.
- I wash my car because I like taking a break in the middle of a busy day.
- I wash my car because the trained cashier prompted me to wash it!

### Begin Today To Promote Your Car Wash

#### *Here is the Good News.*

As experienced car wash operators know, revenue in the field, at every car wash site, is the vital and sustaining life blood of the entire industry.

Smart, proven suppliers understand and embrace this concept too.

#### *Here is the Bad News, however.*

Many "old school" operators are still tethered to self-limiting beliefs and assumptions which negatively impact their ability to market their businesses effectively.

For instance, *do you believe still, that car washing is an "impulse" purchase?*

In fact, have you ever researched and discovered why any consumer would visit your site? Rarely have I talked with an operator who could name more than a dozen different reasons why a customer would get his vehicle cleaned at his wash on any particular day.

Read the twenty-seven different reasons why any customer would visit your wash, and create in your mind a helpful mental checklist: "yes, I know that customer," and "yes, those people also come to my wash."

As you complete this 10 minute learning exercise, you will better understand the varied but predictable shopping patterns and purchasing decisions of your customers.

This useful exercise surely will help you create a more customer-centric marketing plan, and you can better anticipate when your customers are most likely to wash their cars.

Also, *do you believe still, that your biggest competitor is the newer (and maybe even bigger) wash down the road?*

Is it possible, however, that an upscale nail salon, a popular day care center, or a franchised sandwich shop in the same retail strip center are capturing an ever bigger share of local consumer dollars

than your wash?

Consider this possibility: within a three mile radius of your business, there are a hundred retail and service businesses, and they all are busy each day, vigorously competing for the same opportunity to find and capture a happy and repeat customer as you are!

Many if not most of these savvy business owners have written and aggressive marketing plans with clearly identified performance goals. Not surprisingly, they review, update and adjust their plans each week.

Finally, as you can imagine, different owners will also have different goals. For instance, some owners will monitor and know exactly how many new customers they have captured in the first half of the month, while others will remain steadfastly focused on creating more visits and sales from their existing customers.

### Begin This Month To Build A Loyal Customer Base

As you can see, beginning an effective marketing plan for your wash requires considerably more thought and effort than simply printing up some colorful and eye-catching flyers, or updating your on-site signage and reader board.

These three easy-to-complete tasks are important, to be sure, but a comprehensive marketing plan, with specific and written 60-90-180 day goals, should not be beyond the reach of any successful car wash owner and operator.

To help get your creative juices flowing, ask yourself this thought-provoking question: *"what would it mean to me and to my company, if I could increase wash counts this year by 30%, and increase my car wash sales by 20%?"*

Keep in mind, most washes are only operating at 60% capacity. To make this quick exercise especially relevant and impactful, fill in your own numbers or estimates for increasing wash counts and car wash sales.

As you will discover over time, increasing wash counts is a basic, day-to-day marketing and promotion activity.

But building a loyal customer base, especially in today's cluttered retail market, is a much more complex task. I have learned, as

## Increasing Carwash Revenue

### Car Wash Capture Ratio Comparison

In this educational, hypothetical example, the following estimates may be found at a "typical" retail petroleum site:

Gasoline Volume: 110,000 gallons a month  
 Average Customer Transaction: 8 gallons per visit  
 Monthly Customer Transactions: 13,750 per site  
 Average Revenue Per Wash: \$6.00

Car wash capture ratios:	Good	Better	Best
Targeted Capture Rate:	8%	10%	12%
Monthly Car Washes:	1,100	1,375	1,650
Monthly Wash Revenue:	\$6,600	\$8,250	\$9,900
Annual Wash Revenue:	\$79,200	\$99,000	\$118,800
"Lifetime" Wash Revenue:	\$554,400	\$693,000	\$831,600 (84 months)

Emerging hypothesis: automatic car washes in 30-50 foot buildings at many retail petroleum and convenience store sites (pumping 140,000 gallons a month or less) with capture ratios below 8% will become irrelevant.

well, that many successful operators have neither the necessary time nor the acquired skill set to embrace this vital function effectively. In an earlier day, the technical repair and servicing of their equipment was a top priority for most operators. Now they must also find, hire or train one person or company who is directly accountable and responsible for the marketing of their businesses.

### Is Marketing My Wash Worth The Effort?

Some operators, of course, may remain doubtful and unconvinced, thinking that what works in other retail businesses might not be applicable to the car wash business.

*"I am only a car wash operator," these few skeptics might say.*

Business writer Jim Collins, however, would disagree. He says in his book, Good To

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Great, "you absolutely do not need to be in a great industry to produce sustained great results. No matter how bad the industry, every good-to-great company figured out how to produce truly superior economic returns."

You will see that in comparing good, better and best car wash capture ratios at a hypothetical retail petroleum site, promoting your wash and creating loyal customers is indeed a very worthwhile and profitable venture.

We have saved the best news to last.

*Those best in class owners and operators who begin and maintain a dedicated interest in their marketing strategies and tasks this year will begin the long-awaited Canadian car wash breakthrough.*



About the autor: A noted industry veteran and a popular car wash marketing consultant, **Mike Perry** has contributed more than 50 thoughtful articles on vital topics to premier car washing and c-store publications. He can be reached at [mpccws5@aol.com](mailto:mpccws5@aol.com)



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