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INDUSTRY FORUM

Keep *customers* coming back

By Karen Dalton

WHEN IT COMES TO THE CARWASH BUSINESS, there is no shortage of enthusiasm from three relatively new owner operators and Canadian Carwash Association Directors. Richard McKinnon, Stuart Gunn and Scott Murray have found their niche after years in the corporate "rat race".

Richard McKinnon and his wife Wendy based in London, Ontario, who built Miami Car Care Center just three and a half years ago, already have their second location scheduled for completion in the spring of 2008. "Our new location will feature self service, full detailing and touchless automatic carwash options," said Richard.

"We got into the business after I went back to Sir Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario to complete a business degree (following an executive career with a truck wheel manufacturer) and developed a business plan for a carwash operation as part of my course," states McKinnon. After researching good potential sites, investigating how to get financing, developing a marketing and business plan, McKinnon decided he'd like to build a carwash facility. With good support from the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), the LEDC, the Small Business Centre, the Chamber of Commerce, and local bank managers in the city of London, he launched a family business. His son developed the website and handled the graphic design and branding for the carwash operations. A friend of the family, studying architecture at Fanshawe College, designed the building, and his brother built it.

As owner/ operator of the six-bay self-serve carwash, McKinnon finds his biggest challenge is keeping the equipment up and running to ensure a high degree of customer satisfaction. "A key element to a successful business is customer retention," noted Richard. "I'm particularly pleased that we have been able to increase our sales year over year. Not a day goes by that our customers let us know how happy they are with our service and facilities."

One way that McKinnon keeps his customers coming back is by continuing to invest in new technology, new services and by offering good value. "Miami Car Care Center has a one of a kind in-bay G2 AutoVac system, integrated as a wash option by my son Kevin, and a state of the art Exacta credit card and wash code payment system right in the bay. Give your customers the convenience they want," he noted.



Miami Car Care Center offers gift cards for self-serve carwashes.

Stuart Gunn, owner of coincarwash.ca, got into the business because he always liked using self-serve washes and was looking for a secure place to invest. He had owned real estate, ran a successful photography and video company and was looking for something to replace his income with less stress. "I have always liked gadgets and automation, and I find the carwash the ultimate place to play instead of work," said Gunn. He operates a 12-bay self-serve and a newly built nine-bay self-serve in Scarborough, Ontario.

"After running a crazy rat race type of business before, I find the carwashes a walk in the park," said Gunn. "My biggest challenge was the first three months learning all the equipment and how to fix and maintain it. I do all the maintenance myself and this keeps me aware of 'any and all' potential problems. I like to have my equipment running perfectly all of the time," he added. "I would say my most significant accomplishment with the carwash was researching all the equipment and building the carwash from the ground up."

Gunn also plans to expand. "Every two or three years I usually make a big investment in something, so who knows? It may be another location if I can find the right piece of land," said Gunn.

Scott Murray returned to Canada from the US in 2004 as a young, retired executive in the tobacco industry and decided the carwash business was much like the industry he had come from.

"Both business models are high profit margin, addictive repeat business and there is a high barrier to entry," according to Murray. "After observing carwash operations for several years he decided to buy an independently owned carwash in Stoney Creek, Ontario in April 2006. President of Ezee Clean Carwash, with eight self-service bays and a stand-alone rollover automatic touchless carwash, Murray has plans to expand when the right piece of property comes along.

The carwash, now in its fifth year of operation, has increased revenues in the last year and half due to his emphasis on marketing, said Murray. He's promoted the credit card and wash card payment options in the bays, which are a benefit to his customers who need receipts for tax purposes. He also has been creative with his offering of a loyalty program and bonus incentives for volume purchases and discounts on other supplies purchased at the time of the carwash.

There is no disputing that a successful carwash operation requires time and all three operators offer this advice: keep your operations clean; get to know your customers; and focus on service; then everyone in the industry benefits.

As for joining the Canadian Carwash Association, they agree there are really good people willing to share their knowledge in this business and it's a great way to meet fellow operators and share ideas. Getting involved on the Board means they can make a difference to benefit the industry.

TIPS FOR OPERATORS

SPRAY NOZZLE CODES

Often questions arise regarding spray nozzle codes, flow, and pressure. A typical nozzle code in car washing applications is four digits long and contains two pieces of information. The first two digits in a fan type spray nozzle represent the spray angle. The second two digits represent the orifice or size of nozzle.

Typical Nozzle Code: 4007 (40 degree fan, #7 orifice size/7 GPM @ 4000 PSI)

A common misconception is that the nozzle size represents gallons per minute (GPM) through the nozzle. The formula below shows that this is only true at 4000 pounds per square inch (PSI), which in typical car washing applications does not occur.

$$NOZZLE\# = GPM \sqrt{\frac{4000}{PSI}}$$

A more likely pressure would be 1000 PSI, therefore providing 3.8 GPM at the nozzle. Spray nozzle manufacturers typically provide a chart showing various nozzle sizes and pressures, usually taking the guess work out of nozzle selection. Since flow through the nozzle changes at different pressures both desired flow and operating pressure need to be known to make the correct nozzle selection.

Other Variations of nozzle number formula's:

$$GPM = NOZZLE\# \sqrt{\frac{PSI}{4000}} \quad OR \quad PSI = \left(\frac{GPM}{NOZZLE\#}\right)^2$$

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Carwash

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