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Auto Laundry News - Profile in Success

Thorough Prep Delivers Results

By Jim and Elaine Norland

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Want into the car wash business? Get some business experience, do lots of research on the industry, take some training that covers all aspects of the business, try working in it, and have reasonable capital of your own to invest. Richard Sasso has met all those requirements, and it looks like his preparation is paying off.

His Mr. Squeaky Car Wash in Pompano Beach, FL, opened a week before last Christmas, and was paying its own way in just two and one-half months. Its yellow-and-blue colors beckon to the 65,000 cars that pass by daily on West Atlantic Boulevard. An adjoining RaceTrac gas station adds convenience for motorists who want to gas, wash, and go.

The wash is a $3 million state-of-the-art express-exterior tunnel setup. Detail bays provide interior cleaning and other plus services. Free vacuums enable drivers to quickly remove dust and sand from inside their vehicles.

Sasso, a long-time car enthusiast, is no fan of the $3 exterior wash for which volume is the principal criterion. Mr. Squeaky charges $8, $10 or $12 for a three-minute exterior treatment, depending on whether the driver wants extras including triple-foam wax, body protectant, and tire shine. Full-service wash packages start at $21 and go up to $49 for a full-service wash and hand wax. By the second month, the average per-car revenue had reached nearly $14. "The pricing was set around the core belief that customers are willing to pay a few dollars more for great service and a great car wash," Sasso explains.

Given the high prices of commercial property in South Florida, "It didn't make sense for us to charge less than $8 for any car wash. Typical in-bay automatics at gas stations in the area charge $7 or more for a simple wash," Sasso says. "We give our customers a show in the tunnel, and they immediately see a huge difference in wash quality." Plus they get free use of the 18 vacuums.

For his first week or so of operations, Sasso offered a $5 exterior wash, but went to the $8 level on January 1 this year. His grand opening in early March offered the $5 wash as a means of reaching out to the community, and he offered a coupon good for that pricing in a couple of local papers in late February. "Folks came in, coupon in hand, but I don't want to grow my business by couponing," Sasso says.

In his planning, Sasso's goal was to have one out of five customers select the full-service option, and in his first two months he hit that number right on target. "This allows us to give white glove service to the customers who desire the very best," he says.

One key to customer satisfaction is personal attention. Drivers entering and leaving Mr. Squeaky are warmly greeted, often by Sasso —who is on the scene 12 hours a day, seven days a week — or his wife, Lynn. She is a practicing attorney and office manager at her firm, and comes in on weekends to assist with greeting and cashiering.

On busy weekend days or at rush times, Sasso pitches in with his six employees to work on cars. Like his employees, Sasso wears the company yellow T-shirts and hats bearing the company logo, carrying out a yellow-and-blue color scheme reflected everywhere at Mr. Squeaky's. Even the wraps are yellow and blue.

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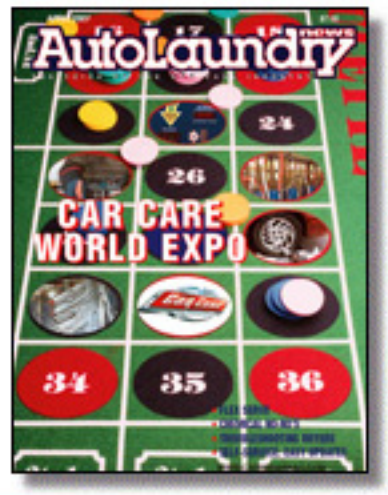

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