

Customers, the Importance of EVERY Impression

It is easy to fool ourselves into thinking that our customers come all the time- I know I see the same people at our sites all the time. We tend to think that people wash more often and visit only our site because it sure feels that way. However, the numbers may speak differently. Studies suggest that the average vehicle (customer in this case) visits your site 2.5 times per year. Some of our data in the exterior model says that number is 3.5 times per year. To make our math easy, let's just say the number is 3 times per year. Now, I am not saying that a vehicle is only washed 3 times a year, simply that a vehicle, on average, only comes to your site 3 times per year.

This is where that time becomes very important. First, let's talk about the amount of 'Face' time you have with a customer. In an express model with automatic pay stations it can be 0, with a cashier as little as 30 seconds, and in the full service model as little as 10 minutes of actual face time to visit with a customer. Do the math- over the course of 365 days or approximately 3,650 business hours, you get anywhere from 0 to 30 minutes of face-to-face time with a customer. That's not a lot of time to make an impression, either good or bad. Take this opportunity to thank them, welcome them and most importantly to remember you in a positive way.

Second, let's talk about your facility. Assuming the average time spent on your lot is 5 minutes for an express customer and 20 minutes for a full service customer, you only have 15 to 60 minutes to make an impression. Make sure that your parking lot is clean, trash cans are empty, landscaping is presentable, employees are dressed properly, and that your equipment and building are not run down. Customers have an ability to notice little things that are out of line and also the ability to notice the good. They can leave and say 'it just didn't feel right' or they can leave and say 'I'm not sure what it was but that was a nice place.' Use the limited amount of time you have wisely to make a good impression.

Third, let's talk about the cost of a customer trying someone else. Everyone understands the threat that they may leave and never come back, so we won't spend time talking about that. Instead, let's talk about the cost of them leaving for one or two washes and then coming back because the grass was not greener at someone else's place. Let's assume your store has a vehicle base of 30,000 cars and 20% try someone else one time. That may cost you 6,000 washes a year and potentially \$30,000 in revenue for an express car wash or \$90,000 in revenue for a full serve. Now go a step further and say those same people try two other stores before coming back. Now we are talking 12,000 washes, \$60,000 in revenue for an exterior and \$180,000 for a full service site. The numbers get big in a hurry just because the customer wondered if someone else could do better.

The bottom line is that every impression is important and you only get a few times a year to make that impression. Use it wisely and make sure that every time a customer comes to see you they know you are the only place for them. As the jingle for *Cheers* went, 'sometimes you want to go where everyone knows your name.'

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