

Adding Express Detailing Services to Your Already Successful Car Wash or Automotive Business

Article by: Lance Winslow

Express Detailing is a term, which has been marketed and inevitably defined by fixed site car washes in their attempt to increase average per ticket transactions. By using express detailing as an "add-on" service for between \$35.00-\$60.00 they are able to up sell a \$4.99 exterior wash direct mail coupon that a customer brings in to a \$40.00- 70.00 charge. Their theory is sound and tends to work well for them. A car wash in and out wash which takes 10-15 minutes for vacuum, tunnel wash and dry and then another 15-20 minutes for a solvent polymer wax, with dash and tire dressing is consistent with their industry \$/hour goals. Now car wash owners have gone one step further with The Blue Coral Wax Treatment.

This is a wax put on while the car is still wet, thus eliminating the drying step. The wax is rubbed on the wet car, dries to a haze and is wiped off which dramatically increases efficiency and adds even greater revenue. Thus by speeding up the process they cater even more to the new consumers attitude. "I want it now", the quicker the better, give me my detail, I have things to do, I'm outta here. Similar customer attitudes are found in the demands of e-commerce where you buy a product today and it shows up at your doorstep next morning guaranteed by Fed EX or Two day service by RPS, Airbourne, UPS, Emery Express, or Fed EX.

In a world of co-branding, point of destination strategies and co-op marketing, all industries are evolving and diversifying to capture greater profits within a single brick and mortar location or as is appearing more commonly on Internet web sites. In general much of the new thinking has been customer driven due to lifestyle changes, low unemployment, time factors and quality of life issues of the consumer. If you look at amazon.com which now sells tapes, records and toys when previously it was strictly a books sales site. It can quickly add new revenue streams by offering it's customer base more reasons to buy more things. You to see the revolutionizing effect of this trend? We have on-line search engines being paid million dollars from car companies and furniture companies for their industries exclusive rights to e-commerce directly on those sites. As Starbucks begins to sell housewares on their web site, and Home Depots add McDonalds inside their stores and Bank of Wal-Mart opening it's own brand of bank within its 5 superstores; you have to think that 'express detailing' at car washes is simply a natural progression. Many professional detailers would disagree saying these types of services are different animals. Some complain that fixed site car washes have ruined the true definition of the term detailing. Yet if you look closely this is nothing more than true capitalism in a free market system generating additional revenues with existing resources.

Think about it for a minute. Professional Detailing Centers often do glass repair, window tinting, pin-striping and graphics, gold plating, ozone treatment, dent repair, color sanding, upholstery repair, wood grain paneling, and even after market auto accessories. These are all industries in their own right and these industry leaders with their own definitions and trade publications and accepted operational procedures complain about us offering similar services as professional detailers. They say we are stealing their customers and not providing the same quality workmanship as the craftsmen do in those industries, which may or may not be true. For example a person specializing in upholstery repair for twenty years can obviously do a better quality job than a detailer on fabrics of almost any type. You are affecting his bottom line with an inferior service since you don't have 20 years experience in upholstery repair understanding the dynamics of thirty different types of fabric, dyes, and manufacturers suggestions for preservation.

Should he be mad at you for offering a greater array of service to you customers? No, the upholstery craftsman will need to have his own set of value added services and products he can offer to his customers such as removing and replacing seats and headliners and using the highest grade fabrics and stainless steel screws. You must have a specialty or an area of expertise, but you must also understand and then cater to the needs and more importantly the wants of your customer. If you don't know their wants and needs, ask your customers directly in an informal survey or indirectly during conversations.

Saying that fixed site car washes have destroyed the meaning of the word detailing may be true to some extent. Yet one must ask, "Did McDonalds destroy the definition of a hearty breakfast when it introduced the 'Egg McMuffin' in Santa Barbara, CA?" Comparing 'express detailing' with a complete detailing service is merely another apples and oranges issue. We as professional detailers realize that there is no comparison. Why does this make so many of us angry? It is all those years of perfection being thrown out the window? But do not look at it that way, look at it as an incredible opportunity. Channel the frustration and anger into energy and perseverance. The fixed site car washes with their quick wax, 'express detail' have popularized the phrase 'detailing' to an entirely new group of consumers who normally might not be interested in your services prior to this introduction. It is up to us to expand upon this and take advantage of the fact that now the general workforce is buying detailing services. Sure it's inferior, but a need, a want and desire to spend money for detailing has been formally introduced. This has opportunity written all over it as Bud Abraham said in a speech he delivered at the ICA (International Carwash Association) annual conference in Las Vegas.

Many feel that this new spin on the old terminology of detailing has adversely affected the professional detailers retail business. Fixed detailers must adapt to this market challenge or loose a large percentage of their retail detail volume and thus have their profitability affected. By differentiating their service and educating customers to the definition of a

'Full Detail' or 'Complete Detailing Service' the professional detailer is able to cater to the ideal retail customer in the middle to upper income classes. Generally members of this market segment understand the difference and are aware of the value of a real detail versus an express service. This high-end crowd can be as much as 15-35% of the professional detailers retail clientele. Let's say that a Professional Detailer has 70% of its business in new and used Car Dealerships and other fleet customers who occasionally need detailing. Vehicles such as rent-a-cars, work vans, or sales cars for corporations and 30% in individual retail, the higher per car profit of all services offered. It is not good business sense for a Professional Detailer to simply ignore that much of their customer base, and therefore they must develop a strategy to help customers and clients understand the difference between the express service and full detail.

Some of the communication problems come into play when a customer is convinced that the \$50.00-\$60.00 (sometimes as low as \$35.00) he or she paid for an express detail is the same service they will get when they pay a \$100.00+ complete detailing service. Even when the higher price comes from a professional and reputable detailing establishment and not a 30 minute 'express service' from a car wash. Unfortunately unless otherwise educated, perception becomes reality.

The problems are compounded when you throw the mobile detailer into the loop. Usually charging \$60.00-\$80.00 and then calling his detailing services a 'full detail'. This market player is fiercely competitive for price as he attempts to establish his new business and has the advantage of on-site service. Many of these new small companies will be in business for a summer or two, or at most a couple of years. Many opt later to establish fixed sites and raise their prices due to increased capital expenditures such as a phone system, fixtures, electrical work, reclaim devises and work benches and increased overhead or rent, electricity, office supplies, water, and reclaim waste water removal. Established mobile detailers who last over two years generally develop a larger clientele and raise their prices simply because of supply and demand economics. Their prices will usually be \$100.00+ for a complete detail.

Many also offer a monthly program including washes, detailing services and monthly billing. Most mobile operations have not adopted the term Express Detailing because they believe they do a better job than the car washes with regard to quality. Many mobile operations will continue the low price of their original full detail of \$60.00-\$80.00, but now use the term 'mini-detail'. This allows them to charge a full detail price to new customers but still offer previous customers and those original customers' word of mouth referrals a low price without giving away services. It also allows them to tap into the customers that may not be able to afford a real detail but still wish to have detailing services for ego reasons, being able to tell friends, "I had my car detailed." Why own a BMW if you can't have it detailed. This appeals to the young executive on his way up the ladder.

A few mobile detailers have used the term 'express detailing', which adds even more confusion to the issue. "What is an Express Detail anyway?" Most of the new mobile detailers eventually go out of business or raise prices due to environmental reclaim issues, competition, seasonal weather, lack proper image, inferior learn as you go training or lack of industry knowledge. Many of the new professional detailers in our industry come from the mobile sector and they tend to price and deliver whatever they can sell to the customer, using the word detail whenever they think it will command a higher price. They will use the word detailing loosely to sell the job.

I think it would be fair to say that the word 'detail' has been over used for marketing purposes at fixed site car washes and has caused problems with the definition and mystique of professional automobile detailing. It has caused havoc for those true professionals who have worked hard and sacrificed to keep the word sacred for many years and have prided themselves in the most excellent service.

Many Old Time Detailing Professionals have been forced to address this express detailing issue by adding express services to their menu of services. This appeases the customer's desire for quick and affordable service between quarterly or semi-annual full detailing appointments. Sometimes this cannibalizes full detailing services but if done correctly it can attract new customers to your business ho will eventually try the real thing. Once they do they will be hooked forever. By letting your customer's experience a full detailing service you will build your complete detailing customer base.

See the chart provided to us by Nicholas J. Vacco, a seasoned detailing veteran. These are the things most full and complete detailing services include:

FULL DETAILING-INSPECTION CHECK-LIST

EXTERIOR:

- _____ Make sure all wax is removed
- _____ Check for wax dust
- _____ Check emblems and crevices
- _____ Check to see if \chrome has been polished
- _____ Check grill and all front areas for bug removal
- _____ Look at rocker panels for tar

- _____ Check wheels for brake dust
- _____ Check white walls
- _____ Make sure tires are dressed evenly
- _____ Check wheel wells
- _____ Make sure wheel well lips are clean
- _____ Check all bezels for wax removal and cleanliness
- _____ Check windows for smears/paint overspray
- _____ Look at mirrors for cleanliness
- _____ Check headlights/tail lights for cleanliness
- _____ Check moldings, weather striping, front air dams, bumper strips for dressing
- _____ Make sure vinyl top is clean and conditioned
- _____ Check wipers for overspray

INTERIOR:

- _____ Make sure carpet is vacuumed
- _____ Check under seats
- _____ Check ash trays
- _____ Check rear shelf
- _____ Check carpet for stains and cleanliness
- _____ Check seats for stains and cleanliness
- _____ Look at door panes for cleanliness
- _____ Check dash board; ac vents, gauges, radio knobs, steering column, levers, crevices
- _____ Check all chrome including seat belt ends, door handles, step plates
- _____ Make sure all vinyl and leather has been evenly dressed
- _____ Check headliner, visors, sail panels
- _____ Check dome light area
- _____ Check seat belts
- _____ Make sure all pedals are cleaned
- _____ Check lower dash for dressing
- _____ Check all door jambs for cleanliness and tar removal
- _____ Check consoles and glove compartment for cleanliness
- _____ Check windows; below inspection stickers, inside rear brake lights, window tips
- _____ Check rear view mirror
- _____ Check vanity mirrors
- _____ Make sure mats are in trunk
- _____ Check to see that personal items are placed in clear plastic bag

- _____ Check for plastic drivers seat cover
- _____ Check for paper mats
- _____ Be sure a hand-out flyer has been placed in car

If a professional detailer will simply look past customer perception that "a detail is a detail" and educate them on the differences, then that professional will get the best of all worlds. By letting car washes introduce the idea and market to the consumers of the world, you will get free advertising. By car washes using the term detailing, even if it is out of context and even if they lower the once high standards in the minds of consumers, they still have opened the market ten fold. Now that this market is wide open and almost everyone has become in their own minds a detailing customer; it is up to the professional detailers to show them 'a real detail'. It is up to us to expand our retail market mix, to expand that percentage of our business' total sales.

Once the customer experiences the difference, they will see our point and know that an 'express detail' is merely a glorified wash with a hand wax, some extra dressings, and perhaps some carpet cleaning thrown in for good measure. It is hardly what professional detailers call a 'complete and full detail'. Once your customer has become accustomed to a real detail and received a service which has exceeded their wildest expectations, that person will be a walking, talking one-person sales army for you and every other professional detailer in our industry. So press on! Let's make believer out of our retail clientele one customer at a time. Lance Winslow - Online Think Tank forum board. If you have innovative thoughts and unique perspectives, come think with Lance; www.WorldThinkTank.net/wttbbs/