

A white car is being washed by a large, rotating blue brush in a car wash. The car is positioned on a conveyor belt, and the brush is in contact with its hood and windshield. The scene is illuminated by bright blue light, creating a high-contrast, industrial atmosphere. The background shows the structure of the car wash, including metal beams and pipes.

# The Car Wash Journey: A New Investor's Guide to Point-of-Sale, Optimization and Business Success



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#ExploreGrowth



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# I. Introduction



We're excited that you are considering investing in the car wash industry. You've picked a great place to start! DRB® has been helping car wash operators and investors squeeze every ounce of profitability out of their businesses since 1984 with innovative point-of-sale and tunnel optimization technology. We have put that knowledge and experience into this e-book to help you navigate this industry that we know and love.

Whether you are just vetting the industry for possible investment or you've already invested, this e-book will provide a wealth of information to help you on your journey. It will help you understand the ins and outs of investing in car washing, lead you through optimizing your returns, guide you on point-of-sale system selection, give you helpful tips for business success and show you how to capitalize on your success to build long-term growth.

We hope the information you find here will further your interest in the industry and help you with your investment. For additional information and assistance, schedule a free consultation with one of our car wash industry experts.



[Schedule Consultation](#)

# II. What to Consider When Investing in the Car Wash Industry

As you consider diving into a new industry, you want to know that you'll get a maximized return on your investment. You want an industry that's stable with an upward trajectory. And maybe you want to have some fun in the process.

Many investors have found that the car wash industry checks all those boxes. Let's take a closer look at this sector, and why it might be a good choice for your next business venture.

## Growth

The car wash industry has gone through a massive period of growth, driven largely by the popularity of unlimited wash plans and the rise of the express exterior tunnel business model. From 2013 to 2018, the industry achieved a 3.6% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in revenue, **according to an industry report by Grand View Research**. The industry's growth is expected to continue, with a predicted CAGR of 3.2% through 2025.

The express exterior tunnel model has been particularly attractive, piquing the interest of private equity investors. In fact, half of 2021's top 20 car wash chains are owned or backed by private equity, and the industry is one of the hottest for **mergers and acquisitions**.

## Consumer Trends

Of course, growth is driven by consumer demand. Car washes provide a service that will always be needed as long as there are cars on the road. While drivers always have the option to hand wash their cars, they are increasingly turning to the convenience and speed of automatic car washes.

According to the International Carwash Association, the number of drivers who wash their cars at home has dropped significantly over the past decade. Sixty percent of drivers say they most frequently wash their cars at an automatic car wash, according to the International Car Wash Association's 2022 United States Consumer Study, up from 48% in 1994. It is estimated that the total annual car wash sales revenue exceeds \$24 billion.

The ridesharing (Uber, Lyft, etc.) trend has also created a whole new customer base for car washes. These drivers wash their cars multiple times a week to maintain customer satisfaction. They can be some of your best customers and best brand advocates.



## Reasons to Invest in a Car Wash

- Predictable recurring revenue with unlimited plans
- Amazon-proof business model
- Consumer usage of car washes is at an all-time high
- Growth of Uber & Lyft has created a new customer base

## Optimization and Scalability

When done right, a car wash business can be automated, optimized and scaled to provide steadily increasing revenue. Car wash technology is constantly evolving and offering new efficiencies and ways to boost throughput. The car wash point-of-sale (POS) specifically offers data that can be leveraged to further improve your operations for increased profits.

## Exit Strategy

If you're looking for a business you can easily sell to maximize returns, a car wash is a good option. Investors love the predictable, recurring revenue that unlimited wash programs provide. Not long ago, weather controlled the car wash business. These plans allowed car wash operators to seize more control and create a stable revenue stream. For that reason, a healthy unlimited wash program can increase the value of your business by 10 times or more.

Another benefit of the car wash is that it is considered an "Amazon proof" business model. As many industries and trades are impacted by online retail giants, the car wash should be considered as a very low risk option. In fact, car washes are benefiting from the e-commerce trend by allowing customers to pre-pay for washes and plans through an online store.

## Risks

Of course, no investment is easy money. Here are a few risks to keep in mind:

- **Weather** – Weather can still have a material impact on the car wash industry. One bad month or season can have a major impact on your annual revenue. Fortunately, the rise of unlimited wash plans has significantly reduced this risk by giving operators guaranteed recurring revenue every month. Having an investment in multiple regions can help diversify the impacts of weather as well.
- **Location** – You're going to make a lot of decisions for your car wash, but the location is the one you can't change, so it's important to get it right. You want a site that has a healthy traffic count and doesn't have too much nearby competition. A car wash consultant can discuss other factors and help you do a thorough site analysis.
- **The Learning Curve** – There's a lot more to car washing than meets the eye. Depending on the **car wash model** you choose, you may find yourself being a salesperson, marketing expert, technician, chemist and more. Try spending time with car wash operators onsite at multiple car washes.
- **Focus on Operational Excellence** – A well run car wash is the key to limiting your risk. Providing a clean, dry, shiny car with a concentrated effort around your customer experience will ensure you maximize your return.

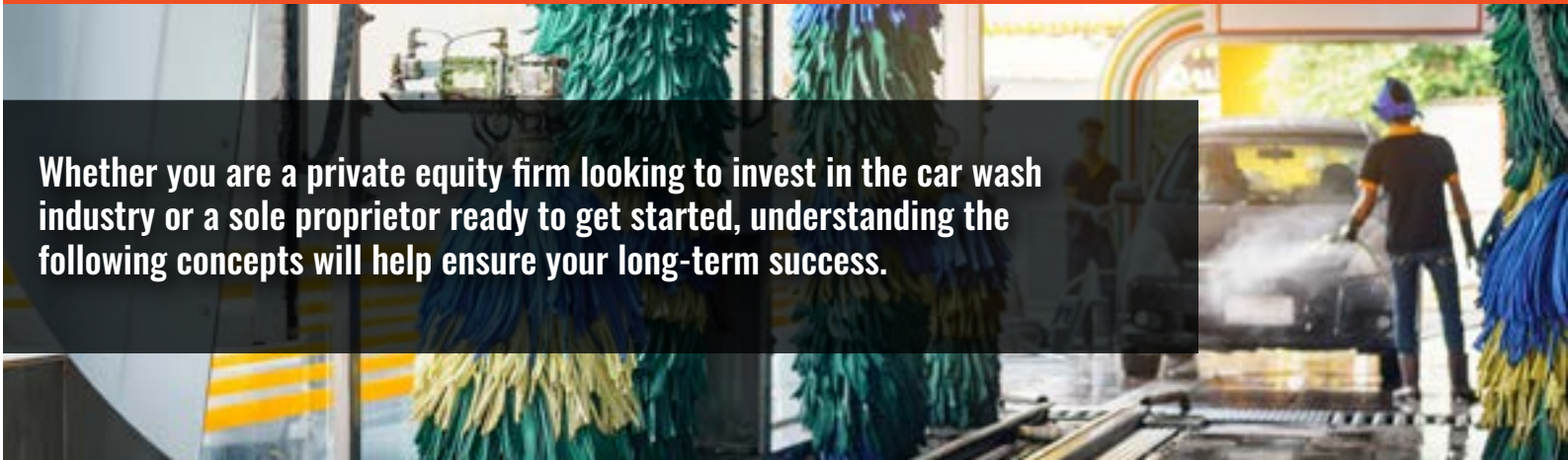
## Take the Plunge – With Caution

Car washing can be a lucrative business. Do your due diligence. Learn as much as you can. Make sure you have a sound business strategy supported with pro forma analysis. And then drive on in to car washing!



# III.

## 3 Important Things to Know About Establishing a Successful Car Wash Business and Driving Long-Term Growth



Whether you are a private equity firm looking to invest in the car wash industry or a sole proprietor ready to get started, understanding the following concepts will help ensure your long-term success.

### 1.

#### Technology and POS is the Foundation to a Successful Car Wash

We've all heard the phrase "you get what you pay for" a million times, but it's something car washers tend to forget when they evaluate car wash technology and equipment. Creating the best car wash that will generate the greatest returns does require a material investment in technology and equipment.

That was certainly true for Parmjit Singh when he opened his first **NEO Express Car Wash** in Hayward, CA. Selecting vendors largely based on price led to mistakes that he had to pay extra to get fixed.

"Paying more upfront is better in the long run," Singh said. "I was tight on money. That's why I tried to cut corners. Now I'm paying more."

Trevor and Matt Gile had a similar experience with point-of-sale technology when they opened **Rainforest Car Wash** in Cleveland Heights, OH. Shopping initially on price, they went through two point-of-sales systems before they found the right fit in DRB® Tunnel Solutions.

"I finally said 'That's it!'" Matt Gile said. "I talked to my dad and brother and said 'We've got to spend the money and do it right.'"

Car wash equipment and technology are important investments. Don't base your decisions on price alone. Get a lot of references and make sure everything you select is reliable, scalable and is backed by a solid, responsive support team.

### 2.

#### Monthly Unlimited Plans Really Do Work

Most established car washers agree the best way to drive volume is through memberships. They create customer activity that drives more traffic, and they cultivate customer loyalty. In poor weather periods, a healthy membership base acts like an insurance policy by providing recurring revenue when single-wash sales are slow. The most profitable car washes have a large membership participation rate.



For someone new to the industry, though, **unlimited wash plans** don't always make immediate sense. Brian Krusz, owner of the **Sgt. Clean's Car Wash** chain in Northeast Ohio, admits it was a bit of a "cliff jumper." He was afraid that customers who washed often would erode the profits, and he wasn't sure how to price the plans. With the help of DRB®, though, he set up a successful program. Today, those plans account for **50-60% of their total revenue**.

"It's made a profound impact on the business from a financial standpoint," Krusz said.

That has given Krusz the ability to provide employees a benefits package and generally gives everyone peace of mind because they don't have to worry about the weather or other factors that would normally slow sales.

The lifetime value of a customer is exponentially increased when they become an unlimited plan member. Here is an example of the difference in just one year:

Average retail customer visits 2 to 5 times per year spending on average \$12 per visit.	
Annual Retail Customer Spend (5 visits)	\$60
A plan member spends an average of \$28 per month.	
Annual Member Spend	\$336

Members spend 5.6 times the annual spend of a retail customer, but that's nothing compared to the profitability difference! Our data suggests members visit an average of 3.2 times per month and the average variable costs per wash is \$3.60.

Profit dollars per year for retail customer	\$42
Profit dollars per year for plan member	\$198

Singh initially did not want to establish an unlimited wash plan because some operators told him he wouldn't make money. He changed his mind when a trusted referral recommended it. The plan has been successful, and he's happy he reconsidered.

# 3.

## Talk With Industry Veterans

As Singh's experience with the unlimited plans shows, it's important to talk with many people who have been in the industry awhile. While there are a lot of great resources online, such as the International Car Wash Association website, Singh says nothing can replace face-to-face time with strong, established operators.

He especially recommends that newcomers visit other car wash sites, look at the equipment and see how everything works.

"For a new person, I was not sure how the system worked," Singh said. "It was so new to me. On paper, you can't predict how it will work."

Attending trade shows, such as The Car Wash Show and regional events, is another way to network with other operators and see technology in person.

## From Zero to Success

Every successful car wash operator was once a beginner. While the learning curve may have been steep at times, every operator mentioned here went on to car wash success and are opening more locations. By learning from your setbacks and taking advice from those who have been there, you can do the same!



# IV. Selecting the Right Car Wash Operating Model

When deciding to dive into the car wash industry, there are many business models you could adopt, ranging from the all-hands-on-deck full-serve to the unstaffed self-serve. The most common models include in-bay automatic, express exterior, full-service and flex-serve.

While the goal of all these models is to clean vehicles, they are vastly different. To make the best decision for your business, you must understand these differences.

## Express Exterior (EE)

An EE, also known as a tunnel wash or a conveyORIZED wash, is where your car is pushed by a conveyor or belt through a tunnel as different pieces of equipment complete the wash process. They often stand alone, but some are part of a larger business that includes a quick lube, self-serve bays and/or IBAs.

Key Characteristics:

- High volume – An IBA can only wash one car at a time. Since each wash takes an average of three to eight minutes depending on the wash chosen, the typical IBA can only wash around 10 cars an hour. At an EE, multiple cars can be in the tunnel at the same time, allowing an express exterior tunnel to wash up to 200 cars an hour.
- Faster service – Their ability to wash cars faster results in significantly shorter wait times for customers.
- Attended – While an EE doesn't typically require a huge staff, you will need someone to help guide vehicles into the tunnel. Some EEs also choose to man their pay stations to help sell unlimited wash plans.

Whereas unlimited wash plans can be a nice competitive advantage for IBAs, they are nearly mandatory for EEs. Most EEs also offer free use of vacuums, especially for their unlimited wash plan members.

While EEs typically require a bigger lot, advanced car wash tunnel equipment can now effectively wash cars with a tunnel as short as 35 feet. Therefore, we're seeing **mini-tunnels** being built, and some operators are even converting their existing IBAs to these smaller conveyORIZED tunnels.



## In-Bay Automatic (IBA)

An (IBA) is the type of wash where you pull inside the “bay” and the equipment moves around your vehicle to wash it. You’ll often find these washes as part of a gas station and/or a convenience store, or they may be attached to several self-serve bays.

Key Characteristics:

- Small footprint – IBAs are typically only 40-60 feet, making them the perfect choice for small lots or as an additional revenue stream for a gas station/convenience store.
- Low initial investment – The smaller lot size often translates to lower real estate costs. Also, since IBAs are smaller and less complex, it costs half as much to equip them as it does a full-length tunnel.
- Unattended – Drivers don’t need help getting into an IBA wash as they do with a tunnel conveyor, so these washes can be unstaffed. This results in lower labor costs and less owner interaction. This also means they can be open and generating revenue 24/7/365.

With an IBA, perception is everything. IBAs are sometimes just seen as “that building out back,” so you need to make yours stand out to help it compete with the “flashier” express exteriors. Make sure you have a clean, attractive and well-maintained site. Maintaining quality and uptime is critical. If your wash isn’t consistently up, running and delivering a high-quality wash, customers will find a wash they can count on.

One way to successfully compete against a nearby express exterior is to establish an unlimited wash plan. In the past, the traditional **RFID technology** car washes use to identify plan members hasn’t been a workable solution for unattended IBAs because someone needs to be on site to affix the RFID tags to new members’ cars. **Mobile apps** are now making this more feasible by allowing customers to redeem washes by scanning a code from their phone instead.



## Full-Service

As the name indicates, employees in a full-service car wash complete the entire cleaning process without any action needed by the customer. It also means the “full” vehicle is being washed – interior and exterior, down to the vacuuming. While most of the work is manual, more and more full-service washes send vehicles through a tunnel for the initial exterior wash rather than hand washing.

Obviously, this model is going to be more labor-intensive than the exterior-only options. As labor costs rise and consumer needs change, the popularity of full-serve washes has declined. The coronavirus pandemic exacerbated this decline as many existing full-serve washes converted to express exteriors to



reduce touchpoints. These washes can still be profitable but usually require areas with lower volume and/or a wealthier clientele with high-end vehicles.

## Flex-Serve

The flex-serve wash is a hybrid option, combining aspects of the express exterior and the full-service wash. In this model, customers typically drive their vehicle through a tunnel, but unlike an express exterior wash, they have the option to select additional, hand-applied interior and exterior services.

This hybrid approach allows you to reduce labor costs and increase volume while still offering the additional services some customers want. However, it will still require more labor than an express exterior to provide those hand-applied services.

## Weigh Your Options

There are many ways to wash a car, and that's good news for you because you can find a business model that meets your needs and those of the customers in the area. Selecting the right one will help you achieve the best ROI and customer satisfaction.

# CAR WASH BUSINESS MODELS



## Which Type of Wash Should You Start?

### EXPRESS EXTERIOR (EE)

Conveyor/belt moves vehicle through a tunnel as different components complete wash

- Higher volume
- Faster service
- 1-2+ employees on each shift



### IN-BAY AUTOMATIC (IBA)

Customer pulls into bay, equipment moves around vehicle to complete wash

- Lower investment
- Smaller footprint
- Can be unattended, open 24/7/365

### FULL-SERVICE (FS)

Exterior cleaned by employees or tunnel, additional interior and exterior services performed by staff

- More labor intensive
- Good for low volume areas with high-end vehicles



### FLEX-SERVE

EE/FS hybrid - vehicle washed in a tunnel, additional, hand-applied interior and exterior options provided

- Lower labor costs and volume than FS
- Provide more services than EE

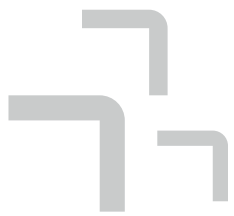


### Another Option: Mini Tunnel

Size of an IBA with the added volume and functionality of an EE. Mini tunnels can be effective with as little as 35 feet compared to a traditional tunnel averaging 120 feet.

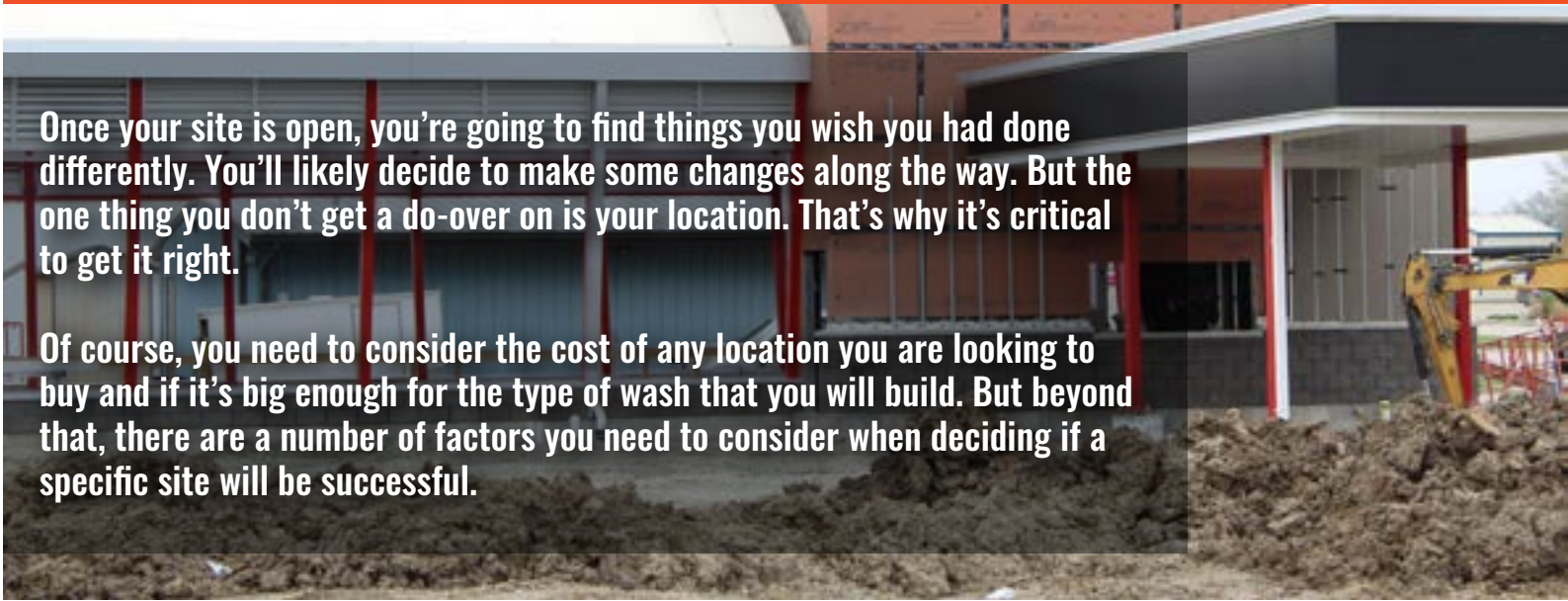


Click the infographic to save for your reference!



# V.

## Site Selection: One Chance to Get it Right



Once your site is open, you're going to find things you wish you had done differently. You'll likely decide to make some changes along the way. But the one thing you don't get a do-over on is your location. That's why it's critical to get it right.

Of course, you need to consider the cost of any location you are looking to buy and if it's big enough for the type of wash that you will build. But beyond that, there are a number of factors you need to consider when deciding if a specific site will be successful.

### Site Selection Myth Busters

There's no shortage of advice when it comes to site section. Unfortunately, some of the most commonly held beliefs about what makes a good site are unfounded.

#### **Myth 1: Don't Consider a Site Unless the Daily Car Count is Over 30,000**

You might be surprised to learn that car count has almost zero predictive value on the performance of a site. It doesn't matter if 30,000, or 35,000 or 40,000 vehicles go by a site daily. You have to combine that number with several other factors to determine if that number is good or bad for any given location.

#### **Myth 2: The Site Must Be Surrounded by a Growing Residential Population**

Many operators won't even consider a stable population, let alone a declining one. However, Suds Creative™ has found that the status of the population only predicts about 20% of a site's performance overall.

#### **Myth 3: The Site Must Have No Other Car Washes Nearby**

Suds has seen operators turn away from a site just because it's .75 miles away from another car wash. But it's not about proximity or even the quantity of competitors. Quality is much more important. The competitor's business model is also important – an express exterior and an in-bay automatic will largely serve different customers.

## What REALLY Matters

There are many factors that, when examined together, can accurately predict the success of a car wash site. Here are some of the most important factors to consider:

- Proximity to Retail – We're not just talking about any retail here. We're talking about proximity to high-frequency retail. These are places where drivers are going several times a week, such as grocery stores.
- Traffic – While simply counting cars won't tell you a lot, there is data behind the traffic that passes a site than can be predictive. You want to be where people are going, not necessarily where they live. You want to be on the list of places they stop when they are running errands or commuting home at night.
- Driver Demographics – Again, we're not necessarily concerned with whether the residential population is increasing or decreasing. Rather we need to look at the demographics related to the traffic we are seeing. What is the age of these drivers? What is their income? These can help predict if these drivers are likely to use your wash and what pricing strategies may or may not work.
- Visibility – It's not enough to just have a location that is front and center on a busy road. The type of road can also make a difference. If it's a limited-access highway with a 55-mile-per-hour speed limit, you'll need large, flashy signs to catch people's attention. You will likely be more successful on a road that has a 25 or 35-mile-per-hour speed limit.
- Ingress/Egress – How easy it is to enter and exit your property is also critical. If a road has a median that prevents an easy turn onto the site, that can be a problem. Likewise, if there is heavy traffic preventing a smooth and safe exit, that can also be an issue.



## Suds Creative's SiteSelect

Fortunately, you don't have to figure this all out yourself. SiteSelect by Suds Creative is the car wash industry's most accurate and powerful tool for determining the performance of prospective wash sites.

Location analysis tools are hardly new, but they were made to only be good enough to get the bank on board. These tools are primarily driven by assumptions and designed to provide assurance rather than accuracy.

SiteSelect makes no assumptions. It uses over 300,000 industry-specific data points to help investors and operators understand and evaluate the growth potential of car wash sites. It blends SUDS.ai machine-learning tools with a proprietary qualitative assessment to provide a robust snapshot of potential site performance. You will receive a five-to-six-page report that will tell you how many members you can expect and how much revenue the site should produce under solid operation.

With SiteSelect, Suds can predict a site's performance to within 80%. The other 20% is determined by operator know-how and engagement. SiteSelect only shows you what's possible, not what's required. What's required? A well-trained team that puts out a great product and takes amazing care of people. The best location in the world is only as good as the operator.

### Get It Right

You only get one chance to select the right car wash site. SiteSelect can help ensure you make the right choice.



# VI. The Car Wash POS: The Backbone of Your Business

Out of all the decisions you need to make for your new car wash, a point-of-sale (POS) system may not sound like the most exciting one. It doesn't have the whimsy of spinning wraps or the flash of in-tunnel lighting. You may be tempted to just purchase the POS your equipment manufacturer recommends or whichever one is most cost-effective.

Doing so, however, can cause you unnecessary headaches and cost you hundreds of thousands of dollars. The POS decision should be as well researched and thought out as the other purchases you make for your wash. It touches every aspect of your business. That's why we like to say it's the backbone of your business.

## Making the Right Decision

You should select your POS when you choose the rest of your equipment, but that doesn't mean you should just select the POS your equipment manufacturer offers. It can be tempting to do so. After all, who doesn't love a one-stop-shop? But think about it: If you were craving Mexican food, would you go to a buffet that had all kinds of food, or would you go to a Mexican restaurant?

Likewise, you should also be careful about relying on a one-stop shop that may not meet your business needs in the long run. Failing to select the right POS from the get-go can create challenges down the line, especially if you successfully build a healthy unlimited wash plan membership. It can be costly to switch providers and difficult to seamlessly transfer all of your members to a new system. Taking the time to carefully select your POS from the start will ensure a smooth start and long-term success.

While it is certainly important to compare the features and benefits of each system, there are a number of other important considerations:

- **Compatibility:** You need to make sure the POS and tunnel controller you select are compatible. For example, our SiteWatch® and Patheon® systems are both compatible with several different tunnel controllers, not just the one we sell. Our IBA POS systems also connect with various IBA controllers. This may not be the case with other POS providers, so the POS decision could dictate which controller you use.
- **Layout and Site Plans:** Site plans must depict where you want pay stations and how many lanes you want to ensure proper



layout and electrical. You also need to know how and where manager stations will be located.

- **Focus and Support:** If the POS isn't the main focus of your POS provider you may also find that it's a lower development priority, and they may not have the right resources in place to support the system before, during and after the install. They may also lack the development expertise to build interfaces directly with other software, such as accounting software systems.

Asking the following questions can help you determine if the company backing your POS can properly support the system and your business as you grow.

- How long have you been in the industry?
- How long have you been providing POS?
- What future developments are you making to your POS?
- How many of the top car washes use your solutions? Ask for verifiable references.
- How is your support structured? Do you help with installation, in person? What training is offered?
- Do you have emergency support hours?
- How many members are on your support team?
- Where are you located?
- Can your software and support scale as my business grows?



## Making the Right Choice - DRB®

Founded in 1984 in Akron, OH, DRB helps businesses in the car care industry drive growth with our unique mix of industry know-how, advanced technology and best-in-class support. As pioneers in commercializing the unlimited monthly wash plans that are now an industry standard, DRB continues to lead by offering innovative point-of sale and car wash technology solutions. Specifically, DRB's solutions are **trusted by more top 50 car wash chains** than all other technology providers combined. This has resulted in massive growth at DRB, especially in the past five years.

### Innovation

We continue to invest heavily in technology to develop high-quality, revenue-enhancing business solutions for car wash operators.

DRB knows the single best way to grow a car wash business is to wash more cars.



**View our innovations, designed to help you generate and manage volume.**

**“DRB is GO’s only solution because we know that DRB is positioned to focus directly on the importance of a unified POS and Tunnel Control system. Companies where the POS is simply a department of the larger organization do not give me enough confidence. I fear that at some point they will deem it to no longer be a profitable department and stop innovating in that area. DRB IS POS and Tunnel control, so I know they are going to be around.”**

**- Brett Meinberg,  
Chief Operating Officer | GO Car Wash**

## Well Positioned for the Future of Car Wash

Strategic acquisitions have played a large role in making DRB one of the most powerful collections of brands in the rapidly growing car care industry.

In 2016, DRB joined forces with Unitec®, a high-performance manufacturer of advanced point-of-sale hardware and software solutions for the unattended and Convenience Store car wash markets.

DRB welcomed NoPileups™ (NPU) to our family in 2018. NPU is the first and only full-tunnel monitoring technology proven to prevent collisions and increase tunnel capacity.

Suds Creative™, a provider of integrated marketing solutions to the car wash industry, joined the DRB family in 2019. Suds meshes predictive analytics and consumer behavior point-of-sale data to inform their recommendations. Backed by data, not intuition or guesswork, their strategic marketing solutions drive more customers and higher ticket averages.



## Most important POS considerations

### How well do they know the business?

- How long have they been in the industry?
- How long have they been providing POS?
- How many of the top car washes use their solutions? Ask for verifiable references.

### Focus & Support

- How is their support structured? Do they help with installation, in person? What training is offered?
- Do they have emergency support hours?
- How many members are on their support team?
- Where are they located?

### Compatibility & Layout

- Is the POS you're selecting compatible with your tunnel controller?
- Where do you want to locate your pay stations?
- How many lanes?
- Where will your manager stations be located?

### Investing for the Future?

- What future developments and investments are they making with their POS?

**Can their software and support scale as your business grows?**



**Click to download this quick reference!**



## Rainforest Car Wash

### Third Time's a Charm for Point-of-Sale Success

Trevor and Matt Gile just wanted to stop the bleeding.

For 18 years, the Gile family ran successful Honda and Toyota dealerships, but it was quickly becoming apparent that they needed an additional revenue stream. Internet shopping was eroding the profitability of both new and used car sales with no end in sight. Improved vehicle technology reduced necessary maintenance, so they were also seeing customers less on the service side.

Meanwhile, their internal in-bay automatic, which they used to provide customers free washes, was a growing source of frustration and expense. In 2010, they decided to close it and open Rainforest Car Wash, an offsite express exterior tunnel that was open to the public.

To their surprise, the car wash replaced and exceeded their lost income while increasing efficiency, but it took two failed attempts at POS systems before finding the winning partner.

#### Challenge

The Giles found that the car wash business had a steep learning curve, especially when it came to selecting the right equipment.

“We probably spent half a million dollars’ worth on mistakes,” Trevor said.

Point-of-sale proved to be a particularly difficult area to get right. They went through two different point-of-sale solutions before they found the right fit.

The Giles chose Rainforest’s first system based mainly on its low price. It included pay stations, but it was hard for customers to reach the machine to make payments. Employees would assist by feeding money into the kiosks, which was inefficient and created the potential for employee theft. The pay stations also broke down frequently.

Worse yet, the system couldn’t process the 5,000 club members they had through the dealership. They decided to switch to a different system they thought would be better.

## Growth Points

Immediate sales impact:

25%

Increase in the first year

50%

Increase in year two

72%

Increase in cars per hour



New marketing capabilities

But it wasn't. This time around, sales were processed through handhelds used by attendants. These handhelds were used to scan members' bar codes, but they didn't always work.

"At that point, I don't think we ever got above 65 cars an hour. It took a lot more time. It took a lot more manpower," Matt said.

Again, they were strapped with a system that couldn't efficiently process their members or sell new memberships.

## Solution

Matt finally got fed up and pulled up a quote he previously received from DRB®.

"I finally said 'That's it!'" he said. "I talked to my dad and brothers and said 'We gotta spend the money and do it right.'"

So, in 2016, Rainforest Car Wash converted its initial location to the DRB SiteWatch® point-of-sale system with an Xpress Pay Terminal® (XPT®).

## Results

The Giles noticed an immediate impact in sales with a 25% increase in the first year and a 50% increase in year two.

"We immediately shot our business up," Trevor said. "We went from basically 65 cars to up to 112 cars an hour. By using a (DRB) pay station, you wouldn't think that it would play that big of an impact, but it drastically increased the number of cars that we could get through per hour."

Now selling and managing memberships is easy. Customers can purchase plans right at the XPT. When they come back for a wash, DRB's FastPass® RFID reader reads the barcode sticker applied to their windshields and lets them right through.

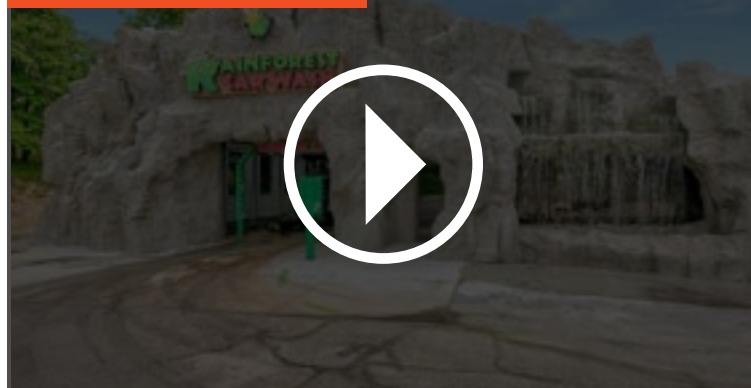
"Now we actually have a point-of-sale system that's good for our customers and gives us the ability to really grow the business," Matt said.

It's been great for employee morale, too. No longer do they have to go outside to process sales, and there are far fewer problems to address.

"Our employees love it probably more than anybody. Actually, I take that back. We probably love it more because it's been extremely profitable," Matt laughed.



Click to Watch  
the Video Testimonial



**"Now we actually have a point-of-sale system that's good for our customers and gives us the ability to really grow the business."**

- Matt Giles  
Owner/Operator | Rainforest Car Wash

## The Future

With the help of DRB, what began as just a way to recoup decreasing revenue has now become the Giles' future. They have sold their dealerships and are now focusing on the car wash business. They already have multiple Rainforest locations throughout Northeast Ohio and plan to continue expanding.

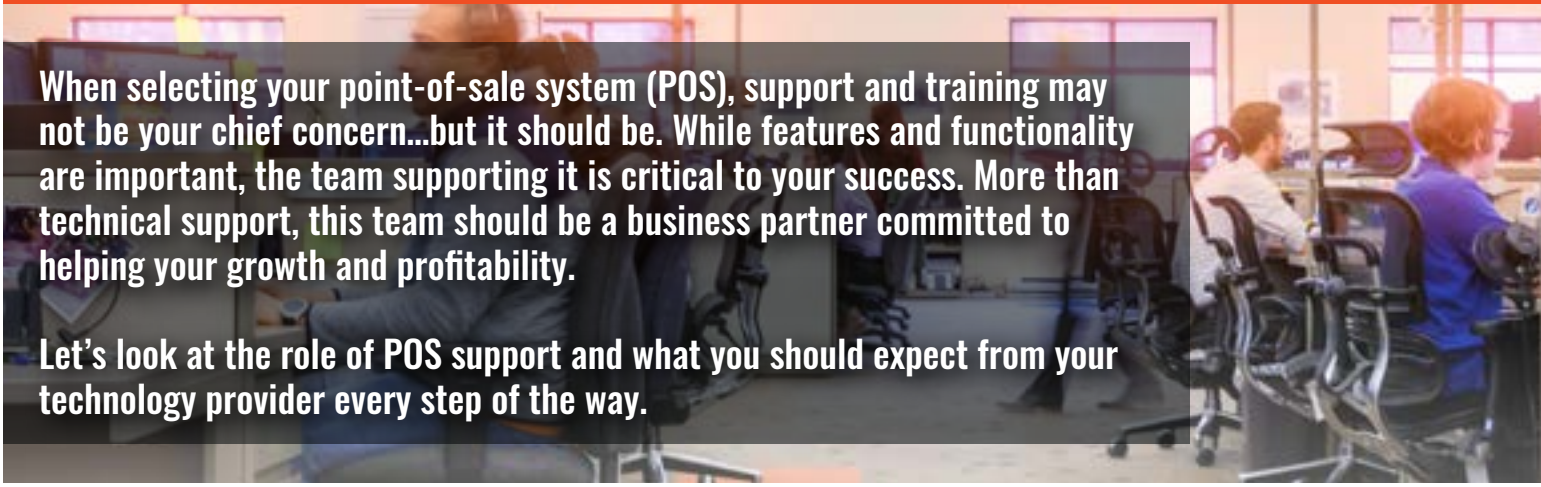
Meanwhile, they've started a consulting business where they help other dealerships open successful car washes. DRB will be with them every step of the way.

They hope other newcomers to the industry learn from their mistakes when it comes to purchasing car wash technology.

"Price isn't everything. You kind of get what you pay for. Get what's best," Matt said.



# VII. Car Wash POS Support & Training: Critical Keys to New Investor Success



When selecting your point-of-sale system (POS), support and training may not be your chief concern...but it should be. While features and functionality are important, the team supporting it is critical to your success. More than technical support, this team should be a business partner committed to helping your growth and profitability.

Let's look at the role of POS support and what you should expect from your technology provider every step of the way.

## Why is Support So Important?

No matter how reliable technology is, there will come a time when something fails, and it's usually at the most inopportune time – like when you have a line of cars on a beautiful, sunny Saturday afternoon.

Downtime equals lost revenue. Beyond that, it impacts your customers' experience. **Gartner estimates** that **89% of businesses will soon be expected to compete mainly on customer experience**. Having a down or underperforming site damages that experience. Therefore, the quality and promptness of the service you get from your POS provider directly impacts the experience you're able to provide your own customers.

Additionally, today's POS systems are significantly more complex and customizable than those of the past. This is great because it means your system can grow and evolve to meet your changing needs. However, you need expert support that can scale with your business and help you optimize your technology so you can:

- Increase volume
- Improve revenue per car
- Lower operating costs
- Prevent issues

## Knowledge and Experience

With all of that in mind, it's clear that you need a partner with deep industry knowledge and experience. Look at how many years they have been in business and their reputation. Find out how they invest in employee training and advancement to ensure their techs can confidently handle any situation they may encounter and provide expert insight into how you can optimize your system. It's important that you are working with a team that has the depth and breadth to promptly and accurately serve its customer base.

You also want to make sure your POS provider is applying their knowledge and expertise to constant innovation so that their solutions are consistently getting better and evolving with your business and industry.

## Every Step of the Way

Support doesn't "kick in" once the wash is up and running. Your POS technology partner should be there to guide you long before your wash is ready and throughout the entire process.

### Planning phase

You don't want to be out there all alone managing a checklist of pre-launch tasks. Your POS provider should be consulting with you throughout the pre-install process. They should provide you with value-added recommendations and best practices on how to set up your operations.

### Installation

Your comfort level with the installation process is paramount. A good provider should offer multiple options for installation support that match your needs as your business grows.

- Onsite – Having a field technician physically present during installation is especially valuable for new operators or those with complex installs. The field tech will also train you on the system and make sure you are comfortable before you start washing cars.
- Virtual – This can be a good substitute for onsite installation due to travel restrictions (such as during a pandemic) or timing issues. However, this is best for organizations with previous install experience.
- Customer-Driven – In this option, a field technician is available for consultation, but the customer essentially handles their installation. This is a good option for larger organizations with their own installation teams and experienced car wash operators who have been through the installation process before.



## Ongoing Customer Support & Training

Once your wash is up and running, you need customer support that is there when you need it (even on weekends and holidays) and how you need it.

Before committing, make sure your potential partner offers the following:

- Phone response within minutes, not hours or days. This is critical as every minute of downtime is lost revenue.
- Priority support when you are unable to wash cars
- Access to loaner/swap equipment, with same or next day delivery available
- Software updates
- Remote training with the option to schedule training time with a representative
- Access to unlimited telephone and email support
- A regional team support model so that when you do have to call, you get talk to the same group of techs that is familiar with your business, its idiosyncrasies and your climate
- A centralized team that works closely with developers, sales, installation and the rest of the organization



## Choose for Now and the Future

The investment in a car wash POS is a significant one. To get the most of it, support must be at the forefront of your mind when you are selecting your system. Make sure you choose a partner that will be there when you need them, is dedicated to your business growth and is capable of growing with your business and the industry.

## DRB® Customer Training

We are committed to helping you maximize the ROI you get from our products. That's why we offer a variety of training options.

### DRB University

Two-Day, classroom-style training with experienced trainers designed to help you get the most out of your DRB technology

- Collaborative, hands-on environment
- Opportunity to network with fellow car wash operators
- Several sessions offered per year at different locations

### In-Person Customized Training

A multiple-day session with an experienced DRB trainer

- Customized training curriculum based on your organization's needs
- Held at the DRB headquarters in Akron, OH, or your location
- Unlimited attendees

### Customized Remote Training

Four-hour blocks of virtual training sessions with an experienced DRB trainer

- Customized based on your organization's needs
- Held via Zoom, recorded and sent to you for future reference
- Unlimited attendees

### Training Materials

Access to hundreds of documents and videos specific to our software and hardware from within our systems



### DRB's Knowledge Center Provides:

- Technical support with 24/7/365 emergency service
- Phone response within minutes, not days
- Priority given to issues that prevent operation



[Click to learn more!](#)

# VIII. How to Build Irresistible Unlimited Car Wash Programs

You've picked an excellent time to enter the car wash industry. The industry is enjoying a period of immense growth that does not appear to be slowing down anytime soon.

A huge part of that success can be attributed to the rise of unlimited wash programs. These programs have adopted the subscription model made popular by services such as Netflix: You pay a monthly fee for unlimited access to whatever the service has to offer. In the case of car washes, it allows subscribers to wash their cars as often as they would like each month.

In a short amount of time, these subscription programs went from being a foreign concept to becoming a core component of nearly every car wash business. And customers have embraced them, too, enjoying the convenience and ability to wash anytime. To achieve long-term success with your new business, you'll want to establish a strong program right out of the gate.

## Recurring Revenue

Allowing customers to pay one monthly price no matter how often they wash may not seem economically sound. What if they wash 10 times a month? What if they wash every single day?

First, that fear is largely unfounded. Yes, you may have some customers who "abuse the system," but our data shows the average unlimited plan member actually washes 3.2 times a month. Second, it's helpful to consider the lifetime value of a customer rather than the amount you effectively make per wash.

Take for example a customer who normally washes their car once a month, spending around \$10 per visit. That means they spend \$120 on car washes a year, not necessarily at the same wash. If you sell that customer a wash plan that is \$20 a month, that customer is now spending \$240 per year on washes, and they're spending all that money at YOUR wash.

That example is really an anomaly. Our studies show that the average non-subscription car wash consumer washes 2 to 5 times a year, so our customer above would only spend at most \$50 a year washing. Now they are a \$240-a-year customer who is locked into using your wash.

# The Many Benefits of Unlimited Wash Programs

Besides the overall lift in profit, many other benefits come with providing an unlimited wash program.

## Recurring Revenue

A major challenge for car washes is unpredictability, mainly caused by weather. Having a particularly rainy season can pose a significant financial risk.

An unlimited wash program lowers that risk. It provides monthly income you can count on regardless of situations beyond your control.

This became abundantly clear early during the coronavirus pandemic when stay-at-home orders kept customers from car washes. While nearly every wash was impacted, it was **much less severe for those that had unlimited wash programs.**

Through a pandemic, a bad weather spell or whatever else might come your way, unlimited wash programs give you financial peace of mind.

The recurring revenue is really what makes a car wash a great investment. It may be why you considered the car wash industry in the first place, and if so, you made a wise decision.

## Contactless Transactions

Members love the convenience of not having to pay every time they go to get their car washed. But in light of the coronavirus pandemic, it's about more than simple convenience. Consumers want to reduce touchpoints in all public interactions. With an unlimited wash plan and automatic vehicle identification, customers have zero interaction with your staff and pay station when they get their cars washed. This also speeds up the transaction and allows for more cars to be washed... driving volume and revenue.

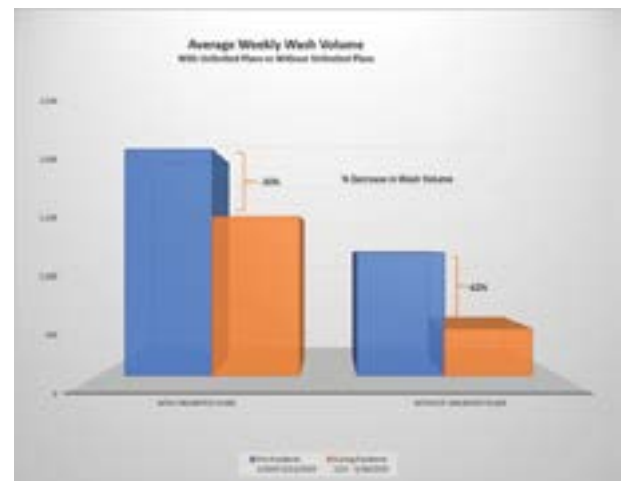
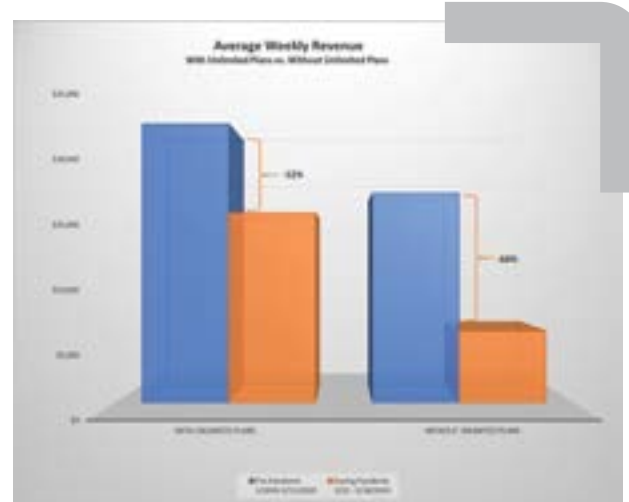
## Group Effect

Unlimited plans create more activity at your wash, and activity breeds activity. When people drive by a wash and see that it's busy, it makes them think about getting a wash, too. So unlimited wash plans can give your single-wash sales a boost, too!

## Resale Value

An unlimited wash program is essential. Consolidators and other buyers typically buy based on multiples of EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortization). As we've already established, an unlimited wash program can increase your earnings, so therefore, it will boost your EBITDA and ultimately your investment return.

Buyers also like to see the recurring revenue provided by a subscription model, especially due to the unpredictability of revenue that we already discussed.



## Designing Your Program

Hopefully, you understand why an unlimited wash program is critical to the success of your business. Now let's see what a successful program looks like.

### Unlimited Program Levels

A monthly unlimited wash program typically has multiple packages or levels under it. As the price increases for a monthly package, so do the services that come with that package. A basic level might just include a standard wash, rinse and dry, while higher levels may include services such as triple foam, tire shine and ceramic coating.

How many levels should you have? Our research shows that the ideal number of packages is three. When you give customers more than three choices, they often become overwhelmed and pick the lowest-priced wash by default.



## Tools of the Trade

To ensure the highest level of success, efficiency and customer satisfaction with your unlimited wash program, you'll want to ensure you have the right technology solutions in place.

### Point-of-Sale System (POS)

It's important to make the right POS choice from the beginning because it can be difficult to transfer members if you decide to change systems down the line. Make sure the POS system is flexible enough to allow you to create multiple plan levels and customize the pricing of your plans.

The system should also include:

- Automatic recharging – Automatically recharging member credit cards monthly to renew their plans.
- Automatic retry – Trying declined credit cards over and over again for a specific amount of time rather than terminating the plan after one decline.
- Grace period – The option to allow members to continue washing while their credit card is being retried.
- Card account updater – Automatically updates customer credit card information to greatly reduce the number of authorization declines you receive.

### Vehicle Recognition

Automatic vehicle recognition facilitates two of the main benefits of unlimited wash plans: convenience and contactless transactions. When a member arrives at the wash, vehicle recognition technology identifies the vehicle as a member's and automatically allows it through to the wash.

There are two key types of technology when it comes to vehicle recognition. These can be used together or separately to identify your plan members:

- Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) - Until recently, RFID was the only option. In this type of system, a reader scans a tag, typically placed inside the windshield, to identify the

vehicle. There are some drawbacks to this method. Some customers don't like having a sticker on their windshield and having someone reach into their car to apply it, especially during a pandemic. There are also many factors (window tints, multiple RFID tags, car technology, etc.) that can hinder tags reading.

- License Plate Recognition - This newer technology identifies plan members by scanning their license plates, eliminating the need for RFID tags. LPR also allows car washes to identify every vehicle with a clear, readable plate that comes to your site, not just plan members. This provides opportunities to personalize marketing messages. For instance, you could use it to show frequent single-wash customers how they could save money with an unlimited plan.

### **Online Store/App**

Traditionally, customers would sign up for a plan at your pay station or a cashier station. Now customers can purchase plans on the internet through an online store on your website and/or a mobile app.

A newer option is a Progressive Web App (PWA), which takes advantage of the latest technologies to combine the best of web and mobile apps. The great thing about a PWA is that the customer doesn't have to download it, so it doesn't take up space on their phone. They simply add the site to their home screen so they can use it like an app. And unlike an app, you don't have to publish a PWA to Google Play or the Apple App Store. You can set up a PWA with our advanced technology platform Patheon®.

When paired with LPR, an online store, mobile app or PWA makes the unlimited wash plan signup process completely contactless. Customers don't have to interact with a pay station to sign up, and an attendant doesn't have to reach in their car to apply an RFID tag. When they purchase a plan online, they simply provide their license plate number so they can be recognized by the LPR system.

### **Reporting Engine**

Once your program is up and running, you'll need a robust reporting engine that will allow you to analyze its success. You especially want to look at which plans are selling so you can adjust pricing and features. You can also see plan usage and members in danger of falling off due to expired credit cards.



## Secrets to Success

Like anything, what you get out of your unlimited wash program has a lot to do with how much you put into it. Here are some ways to boost the impact of your program.

### Marketing

Any marketing vehicles you use to market your wash can be used to spread the word about your unlimited wash program: Email, social media, signage, direct mail, pay-per-click search advertising, pay station screens – the possibilities are endless.

Perhaps the best marketing vehicle is your people. Many car washes choose to man their pay stations and have attendants discuss plans with customers, pass out pamphlets, etc. Some choose to incentivize their attendants with commissions or bonuses.

### Free Washes at Grand Opening

It's become common practice to give out free washes for several days or a week upon first opening to get people to try the wash. However, many washes fail to capture any contact information from their visitors. Make sure you at least get email addresses so you can use email marketing to promote your unlimited wash program.

### First Month Discounts

Another common tactic is giving the first month of an unlimited wash plan free or at a significant discount to get customers to try it. Some car washes partner with car dealerships to provide new car owners with free membership for a month in hopes that those visitors will convert into paying members.

### Encourage Washing

Conventional wisdom would say that the less your members wash, the more profit you receive. However, you actually want members to wash often, especially during the first month. Research from **Suds Creative™** shows that members who use their plan four or more times in the first month stay in the plan longer, resulting in a higher yearly revenue per customer.

Keep in touch with new members via email and text messaging to remind them to use their plans. Educate them on the benefits of washing often. By creating a habit from the get-go, you increase your chances of creating long-term members.

## Get with the Program

Unlimited wash programs have played a large role in the growth of the car wash industry, and it can play a large role in the growth of your business, too. But simply having a plan won't ensure success. Using these tips to get the right pricing, tools and marketing strategies in place will help create an irresistible plan that will benefit your business for years to come.





# Sgt. Clean's Car Wash

## New Car Wash Chain Turns Underperforming Washes into Revenue-Generating Powerhouses

In just a few years, Brian Krusz and Andrew Bendik went from being car wash industry newcomers to owning one of the most successful car wash chains in Northeast Ohio.

When the two childhood friends acquired an ailing tunnel wash in Strongsville, Ohio, in 2013, many doubted their ability to turn it around. However, they quickly proved the naysayers wrong. Renaming it Sgt. Clean's Car Wash, a nod to Krusz's service in the United States Marine Corps, they revived the business with what has become their signature brand of personalized service.

Since then, they've added several locations, and they keep growing. Krusz credits their team, dedication to employee training and their partnership with industry-leading car wash technology provider DRB® for their success.

"Without a doubt, we wouldn't be where we are today without the guidance and wisdom of DRB," Krusz said.

### Challenge

Krusz and Bendik ran their first location for one year with an old DOS version of DRB's software. While they were able to increase revenue by 26% from the previous owner in that first year, they knew they would need updated equipment to truly succeed.

Even though DRB was their first POS vendor, they still researched every provider they could find; even traveling to visit different vendors and car wash sites in search of the most user-friendly system for both their team and their customers.

### Solution

All roads led back to DRB.

"It was the smoothest and easiest," Krusz said. "Plus, DRB provided a ton of information. The reporting and capability of getting data was just profound."

## Key Stats



1,500% revenue increase in 4 years



1,000 plan members in the first year



50-60% of annual revenue from monthly wash plans

Perhaps even more profound was how genuine and positive the company and its representatives are.

“When I would ask other vendors if they could do this or that, it was always a no,” Krusz said. “DRB always had a ‘Yes, we can do that’ or ‘We’ll see what we can do.’”

That willingness to go above and beyond led Sgt. Clean’s to select DRB. Since then, they have used nearly every product in DRB’s portfolio.

“They do things the right way,” Krusz said. “They treat people the right way. If there’s an issue, they get it resolved as soon as possible. I’ve heard horror stories of customer service at other businesses where there are huge malfunctions. With DRB, it’s always been ‘We’ll take care of you.’”

## Results

Since 2014, Sgt. Clean’s revenues have increased by 1,500%, due in no small part to the capabilities offered by DRB. Specifically, DRB introduced Sgt. Clean’s to monthly unlimited plans.

At first, unlimited plans were a bit of a daunting concept. How should plans be charged? Would members erode profits by washing too much? “It’s a bit of a cliff jumper,” Krusz said. “They helped us learn and understand it.”

DRB also set them up with the tools they needed for a successful program. The Xpress Pay Terminal® (XPT®) allowed customers to easily purchase plans from a convenient touchscreen. FastPass® saved time by using RFID technology to automatically allow plan members to the tunnel in less than two seconds without even requiring them to lower their window.

Unlimited plans, using the Automatic Recharge Module® (ARM®), have been a game-changer for Sgt. Clean’s. They signed 1,000 members in the first year, and the plans now account for 50%-60% of their total annual revenue. More than that, the recurring revenue gives the owners and staff peace of mind and allows Sgt. Clean’s to provide health insurance and a 401(k) to its salaried employees.

Within the past year, Sgt. Clean’s has added two new DRB products. The first is the CarPics® Touch queue management system, which allows employees to more easily manipulate the queue from a touchscreen at the front of the tunnel.

They also added the NoPileups™ tunnel management system that uses advanced computer technology to stop the wash when a collision threat is detected. When there’s an issue, it

pinpoints the source so it can be easily and quickly resolved. Moreover, it allows operators to increase roller speeds and set optimal spaces between cars because they don’t have to worry as much about pileups.

“Our whole business model hinges on getting people through the tunnel as efficiently and quickly as possible,” Krusz said. “DRB allows us to do that at the best possible level.”



**“Without a doubt, we wouldn’t be where we are today without the guidance and wisdom of DRB.”**


**- Brian Krusz  
Owner | Sgt. Clean’s Car Wash**

## The Future

Krusz has his eyes set on more growth in the coming years. He knows that DRB will be a big part of that growth. “Obviously, the industry is constantly changing,” Krusz said. “We want to partner with people who are going forward as fast as we are. DRB will be our knowledge source and will help us grow with innovation and new products.”

Krusz has never second-guessed his partnership with DRB. “We’ve never had a reason to reconsider,” Krusz said. “They have proven year-after-year to be a top, genuine company.”

# IX. How to Ensure Your Car Wash Success: The Magic of Marketing



So you're opening a new wash. You've spent months – not to mention a small fortune - getting it ready.

During that time, you've probably imagined your grand opening with long lines of customers clamoring to try your wash. After all, you carefully selected the right location, equipment, chemicals and employees. It's all come together into a beautiful wash that will just naturally attract customers.

Unfortunately, it's usually not that easy. Failing to map out a marketing strategy from the beginning can quickly turn your big launch into a false start.

## But first...

Before you can create and implement a marketing strategy, you need to determine your branding and create your foundational marketing elements. Getting this right will set you up for success as you open your wash and for years to come.

Your branding will set the look, tone and feel for your whole business. It should be infused into everything you do, from signage to the demeanor of your employees to the music that is played at your site.

Once you've nailed down your brand, you can start creating the foundational marketing pieces that are necessary to execute your marketing strategy:

### Website

Your website is like signage for the internet. It ensures passersby (internet searchers) find your wash and get all the information they need to decide to choose yours over others.

Your website should:

- Clearly explain your wash packages and unlimited wash plans
- Provide your address and directions to your wash
- Convey your unique value proposition – why they should choose your wash
- Promote special offers and coupons
- Link to your point-of-sale (POS) system so customers can make purchases online 24/7, including membership signup utilizing LPR

Your website should align with your brand, both aesthetically and in its voice. Also, make sure you employ good **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** so that internet searchers will find your website.

## Signage Design

From your wash's road sign to directional signs and wash menus, you need to make sure they all convey your brand look and feel while being clear and attractive. Don't forget about temporary signage, such as "Coming Soon" and "Open Now" banners.

## Marketing Collateral

This is also the time to lay out brochures, flyers, wash club sign-up forms, surveys, etc. Think about anything you might want to hand out to customers and make sure it's designed and ready well ahead of opening day.

## Pay Station Screen Design

Your pay station can be your best salesperson, so it's important that you get your kiosk screens right. Work with your point-of-sale provider to create the screens you need. Keep in mind any specials you may want to offer as well as making sure your pay station effectively promotes your unlimited wash plans and any upsells.



## A Marketing Plan

A lot of businesses approach marketing by simply trying a bunch of things and seeing what will work. If you truly want to get ROI, though, you need a marketing plan. A marketing plan is a long-term, forward-looking strategy with the fundamental goal of achieving a sustainable competitive advantage.

Your marketing plan should include:

- Market analysis and research to identify your target audience
- What methods you will employ pre-opening, grand opening and post-opening
- How much you will budget for marketing
- How you will measure success
- Who is responsible for each step of the plan

Remember, it's easier to turn off marketing efforts if you don't need them than to scramble to build them when you're already up and running.

## Tricks of the Trade

Your marketing plan should include a mix of marketing tactics that can include:

- **Press Release** – Distribute a professional press release to various mediums, especially local news outlets. It should be concise while still describing the owners, the business and the unique benefits of your wash. Be sure to mention your grand opening dates and any specials.
- **Paid Advertising** – This can include print, digital, social media (Facebook) and pay-per-click search engine advertising. Try to drive customers to a landing page on your website where you can collect contact information to use for continued marketing.
- **Distribute Printed Materials** – Fliers and coupons can be distributed through snail mail, door-to-door distribution or through local chambers and other local businesses. This can be a great, tangible way to let people know you're in the neighborhood.
- **Social Media** – Establish a presence on the channels where your audience is most active. For a car wash, this will most likely be Facebook and/or Instagram. Be careful to not be too self-promotional. It's ok to share the occasional deals, but don't always be selling. Make sure you're sharing relevant and engaging content.
- **Email Marketing** – In many of these tactics, you'll notice we remind you to collect email addresses. With this contact information in hand, you can then use email marketing to let people know of special deals, educate them on the value of your unlimited wash plans or simply let them know what's new with your wash.
- **Text Messaging/SMS** – Text messaging is another great way to send coupons, discounts, announcements, etc. Our partners at Suds Creative™ have developed a new text message program called SendIt that's integrated into their Sudsy marketing automation platform as well as DRB® software via ODBC and API connection.
- **Pay Station** – Your pay station can be one of your best sales tools. You can promote your unlimited wash plans, offer coupons, upsell customers and more. You can also hold fundraisers where a portion of the profits for a day go to a certain organization. This can potentially drive new customers who support the organization to your wash.
- **Incentivize Staff to Sell Unlimited Wash Plans** – Consider a commission or bonus structure to encourage attendants to sell unlimited wash plans.
- **Free Washes** – Giving away washes is a great way to get customers to try your business. It's common for new car washes to wash vehicles for free in the first few days or week in business. Don't forget to collect email addresses or mobile phone numbers in exchange for those free washes!
- **Business Fairs** - Host a table or "booth" at local business fairs and community celebrations. Customers like to do business with businesses that are engaged in the community.
- **QR Codes** – On signs, mailers and handouts, add QR codes that customers can scan to go to your web store/mobile app/Progressive Web App and purchase an unlimited wash plan, get discounts, etc.



Whatever marketing tactics you use, the goal is to make people aware of your wash so they will try it and hopefully come back again and again. Or better yet, become a member.

## Analyze and Win...Faster

Perhaps the most important part of your marketing is tracking, analysis and optimization. As we've mentioned, our team at Suds Creative leverages the tactics mentioned above to drive memberships, volumes and profitability. They track their progress and your success every step of the way, adjusting and learning as more data becomes available. With the largest car wash customer base, Suds has learned what tactics work and what to expect in certain markets based on population density and traffic counts. Suds can help you understand what strategies to employ to accelerate your business to reach its maximum potential as quickly as possible.

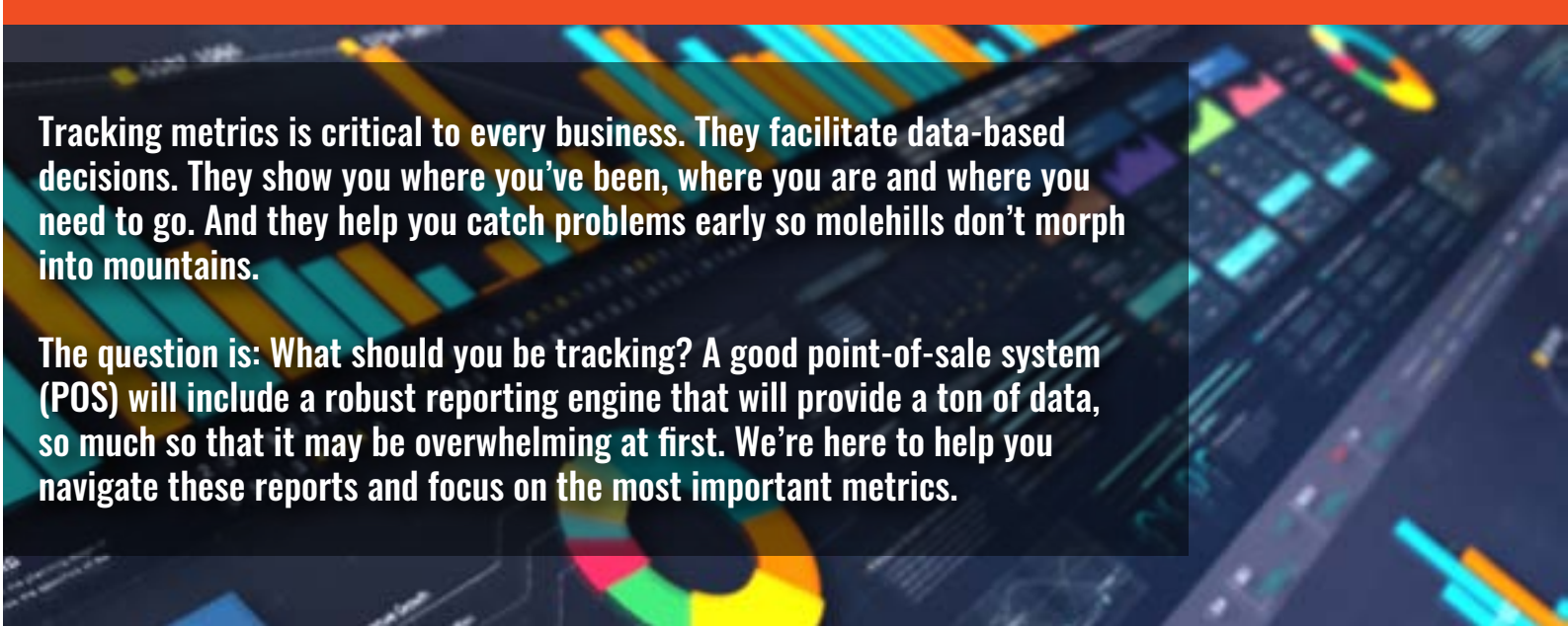
## In It to Win It

As we've said, your marketing plan should help your wash achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. The only way to know if your efforts are working is to measure your success. Remember, what works today may not work tomorrow. Keep track of your marketing metrics and adjust your strategy whenever necessary.





# X. Car Wash Point-of-Sale Metrics



Tracking metrics is critical to every business. They facilitate data-based decisions. They show you where you've been, where you are and where you need to go. And they help you catch problems early so molehills don't morph into mountains.

The question is: What should you be tracking? A good point-of-sale system (POS) will include a robust reporting engine that will provide a ton of data, so much so that it may be overwhelming at first. We're here to help you navigate these reports and focus on the most important metrics.

## Daily Reports

There are a few reports we recommend car washers review every day to help them stay on top of their business.

### General Sales

Whichever POS you choose should provide you with a General Sales Report. This report shows the details of everything that has gone into your system for the day, including items, coupons, discounts, etc.

As you are looking at this report, pay special attention to:

- What products you are selling – If you're selling more lower-tier washes, for example, you may want to consider marketing tactics to move more people up to your premium wash.
- Coupons/Discounts – Discover which offers are driving business so you can invest your efforts in the most successful promotions.
- Over/Short Amounts – Shortages may indicate internal theft, but it could be an issue with your setup. Either way, the sooner you can identify the problem and resolve it, the better.
- Cash management tools that ensure reconciliations can be performed timely allowing for proper accounting controls

### Wash Stats

Your Wash Stats Report provides the answers to important questions you should be asking yourself throughout the day: What is your car count? What is your dollar amount per car? Do you have more staff on hand than you need? Or are you short-staffed? How many cars do you have per hour?

The answers to these questions can help you make adjustments throughout the day. Eventually, you'll be able to make informed predictions that will help you plan ahead, particularly when it comes to staffing.

### **Daily Recharges Report**

If you have unlimited wash plans, and we hope you do, your POS system should be automatically recharging member's credit cards monthly to renew their plans. The Daily Recharges Report will show you how many plans were renewed and the total dollar amount.

Perhaps more importantly, it will also show you recharges that were declined. Of those declined, you'll be able to see which ones will be retried and which will be marked lapsed because their retry period has expired.

Beyond that, you want to look at the success rate for your first attempts. In our experience, most washes are around 90%. The important thing is to identify what is normal for your wash. If you notice that the percentage starts to stray from that norm, you'll want to investigate.

## **Weekly Reports**

There are some key reports that car washers sometimes overlook, such as these that should be reviewed weekly.

### **Employee Security Keys**

Most POS systems will provide you a report that details the security events that occur at your wash, such as voided sales, discounts that require special approval, incomplete sales and abandoned sales.

Voided sales are particularly important. An increase in voids could indicate employee theft, but it also could just suggest that a cashier needs to be retrained. Either way, you want to identify and resolve the issue before it becomes a bigger problem.

Incomplete sales can also help you fix problems before they get serious. If you have a spike in sales that were marked paid but never marked as serviced, there could be a problem with the communication between your POS and your tunnel controller. Gone unchecked, your staff will inevitably find a workaround, but it will likely be less efficient and result in longer customer wait times.

### **Deposit Amounts for Credit Card Transactions**

Remember, when you're dealing with credit card transactions, you're dealing with two different systems: your POS and your credit card processor that are communicating back and forth online. Many things can happen in that communication. You need to make sure that the amount your POS system says should be deposited in your bank account from the credit card company matches what actually is deposited. Keep in mind that the date the POS system has recorded the transaction in the report may be different from the date the credit card processor has recorded it as deposited. Also, remember that the card processor will likely deduct their fees before making the deposit, which may cause a discrepancy in the amounts.

### **Member Analysis**

This report allows you to look at current members as well as those who have recently fallen off. You can also see member recharge status. If you see a customer who has an expired credit card, you can reach out to them and get their correct information rather than allowing the system to continue retrying.

The usage stats in this report can help you identify customers who aren't using their unlimited wash plan. While that may seem like free money, those customers are less likely to remain on your plan. In fact, Suds Creative™ has found that customers who use their plan at least four times in the first month are 61% more likely to still be on the plan six months later. So rather than simply collecting money from these customers, you may want to reach out and remind them to use their plan. Particularly in that first month, Suds recommends reaching out to them four or five times to help establish a healthy washing habit.

## Monthly Reports

Most of the reports we suggest operators look at monthly revolve around your unlimited wash plans.

### Churn Rate

Your Churn Rate is the percentage of wash plan members who have dropped out. You can see the bigger picture if you look at it monthly rather than daily or weekly.

There are different ways to calculate churn. If you have multiple POS systems, you need to learn how each one calculates it so you compare the numbers accurately. At DRB®, we calculate Churn Rate by dividing the total number of customers who have left the plan (whether voluntarily or involuntarily due to credit card decline) by the starting membership number.

To determine how to drive churn down, you need to determine what drove it up. If customers are choosing to leave, look at their usage and how long they've been in a plan. If you notice a large percentage of customers are leaving soon after they sign up, you may want to offer discounts for staying in the plan for a certain length of time, such as half off for the first six months.

If credit card declines are causing churn, look at your automatic retry settings. If your system is not automatically retrying cards or only doing it for a few days, you could drive Churn Rate down if you set it to retry cards for 14 days or longer. Also, consider utilizing a processor that provides a credit card updater that will automatically update expired credit cards if allowed by the customer's bank.

### Ending and Starting Membership Counts

You may assume if you are selling the same amount of unlimited wash plans that your membership numbers are steadily climbing. That may not be the case, though, if you have a lot of drop-offs. The Ending and Starting Membership Counts will show you that big picture.

If you look at this monthly, you'll begin to identify patterns and peak membership seasons. When you know your slow time is coming, you can ramp up your marketing efforts to drive new memberships and convince existing members to stay. **Suds Creative** can help with data-backed marketing strategies.

### Membership Usage

A Membership Usage Report will show you how many washes customers redeemed over a 30-day period. This report can provide a great perspective. When you see a customer come in once maybe even twice a day, you may think they're killing your profits. This report will show you that for everyone who overuses the plan, they are typically offset by those who only wash once or twice a month and may even skip some months altogether.

We have found that the cheaper plans tend to have the lowest usage. It's the "The Netflix Effect" where it's so cheap, they don't think about the auto-renew coming through.

Again, if you notice that some plan members aren't coming in at all, you may want to reach out to make sure they understand the recurring charge or send out incentives to get them to the wash so they see its value and maintain their memberships.

### **Wash Stats**

As mentioned earlier, you should look at this daily, but don't forget the monthly data. If you're a multi-site owner, this is a good time to compare car counts and revenue. It's not enough to just look at revenue. If you do, you may assume a site with lower revenue is doing poorly, but it may actually be your higher volume site. If you notice this trend, you may want to dig in deeper with a Cross-Site Usage report. You may find that the site with higher revenue is doing the unlimited plan recharges while the site with low revenue but high volume is where customers are using their plans.

Another thing that you want to do is compare your stats to the previous month and the same month of the previous year. If you use a DRB® POS, you can also access IndustryWatch®, which allows you to compare your wash's numbers to current industry averages.

## **The Importance of Timely Wash Statistics**

In addition to end-of-day reporting, there are a number of important questions you should be asking yourself throughout the day. What is your car count? What is your dollar amount per car? Do you have more staff on hand than you need? Or are you short-staffed? How many cars do you have per hour?

The answers to these questions can help you make adjustments throughout the day. Therefore, to achieve maximum return on investment, you need quick and easy access to your wash stats such as:

- Sales information that can tell you how well your site is generating revenues and profits. You'll want access to hourly and daily car counts, dollars per vehicle, extra service sales per vehicle, total extra service sales by type of service and sales by employee for any profit center.
- Labor information that shows how efficiently your site is operating. You should be able to access graphical presentations that show traffic volume per man-hour, labor cost per vehicle and labor cost as a percentage of revenue.
- Comparisons that allow you to gauge how well a particular site, group of sites or manager is doing by comparing data for different locations in your chain. Ideally, you'll be able to see hour-to-hour, day-to-day and month-to-month comparisons for sales and labor stats. A robust system will also allow you to see how any week compares to one in the prior year or average week.



## Access to Manage Key Performance Indicators Anytime, Anywhere

DRB's POS systems allow you to easily access your data remotely. SiteWatch® users can access StatWatch®, DRB's robust web-based tool that gives wash owners quick access to business data. Also available as a phone app, it affords wash owners maximum flexibility to manage their businesses from anywhere they have internet connection. StatWatch provides constant real-time, secure, and up-to-the-moment updates of key sales and labor stats.

For Patheon® users, Insights is the next generation of reporting and analytics. Built on a powerful business intelligence engine, Patheon Insights allows wash owners to schedule reports and set alerts if certain key performance indicators fall below or above certain thresholds.

More importantly, it provides interactive dashboards and narratives. Combining an AI-driven platform with a simple mouse-click of certain data points, this business intelligence system gives owners actionable insights to increase sales and revenue.

## Get the Data You Need

Now that you see how important metrics are to the success of a car wash business, you will want to make sure the POS system you select includes a robust and intuitive reporting engine. It should be cloud-based so you can access your data anytime from anywhere. You also want to ensure that they have a support staff that can help you understand the data and make adjustments to your POS settings based on what the data tells you.

The value of data is undeniable. Knowing how to track and use it effectively can make the difference between a good car wash and a great one.

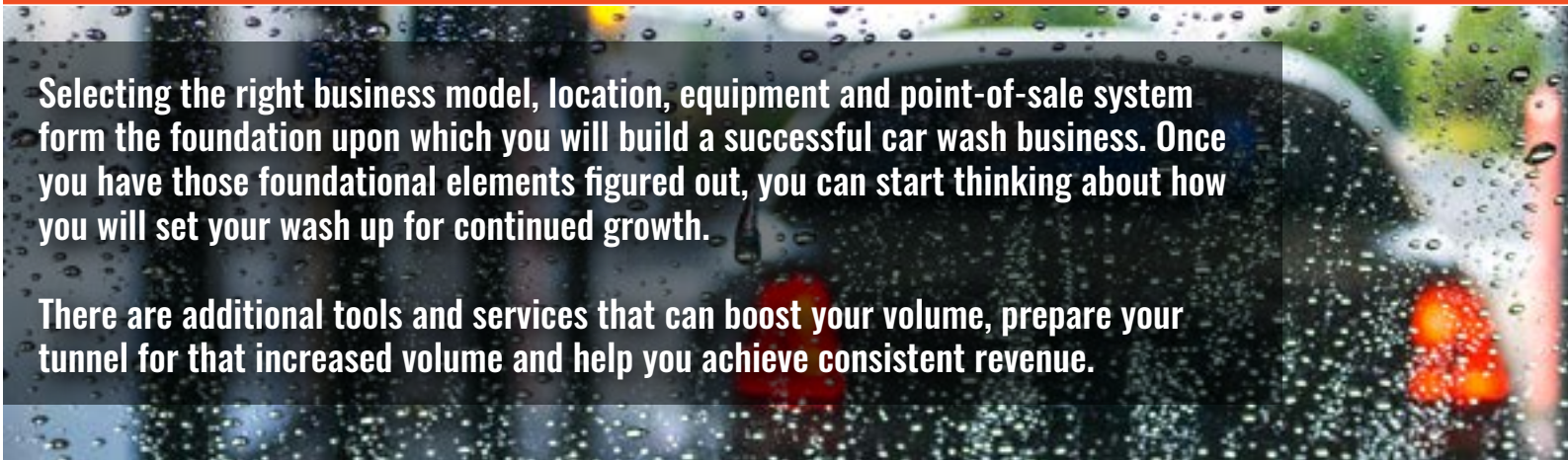


StatWatch



Patheon Insights

# XI. Growing and Managing the Car Wash



Selecting the right business model, location, equipment and point-of-sale system form the foundation upon which you will build a successful car wash business. Once you have those foundational elements figured out, you can start thinking about how you will set your wash up for continued growth.

There are additional tools and services that can boost your volume, prepare your tunnel for that increased volume and help you achieve consistent revenue.

## Unlimited Wash Plans

The most important thing you can do to drive volume and revenue to your site is to establish a **monthly unlimited wash program**. In these programs, customers pay a monthly fee to wash their cars as often as they would like.

These subscription plans have proven to be a boon for the car wash industry, providing recurring revenue that smooths the peaks and valleys washes experience due to weather and economic factors. They also create activity at the wash. Activity creates activity – people see others washing their cars and think maybe they should get a wash, too.

## Analytics

Your car wash point-of-sale (POS) system should provide robust, cloud-based reporting to help you keep on top of your business from anywhere. You can use those metrics to make improvements to your operations.

One of the key things your **POS reports can tell you is your wash volume and revenue**. Over time, you'll begin to identify patterns. You may notice that certain times of the day or certain days of the week are typically slow. You may want to run special promotions that are good only during these times to create activity.

Our partner **Suds Creative™** can help you take these analytics to the next level. Suds is an analytics, software and design-driven car wash marketing agency that works exclusively with the car wash industry. They can apply predictive analysis to the data points provided by your POS system and prescribe effective marketing strategies. They also utilize consumer psychology concepts to help you select the most effective pricing structure and wash menu design.

## NoPileups™ - A Great Tool for Driving Operational Excellence

It's important to not only build volume but to have processes and tools in place to manage it efficiently. You need to be able to get cars through the tunnel quickly to ensure customer satisfaction and keep your revenue up.

One thing that can hamper your efforts is the threat of in-tunnel collisions. This threat has grown due to automatic braking technology that can kick in in the middle of the tunnel and cause rear-end collisions. Many car washes mitigate the risk by increasing the space between cars, but that slows down production.

NoPileups is a full-tunnel optimization service that uses advanced video and machine learning to automatically stop the conveyor or belt when collision threats are detected. This reduces downtime caused by collisions and also allows attendants to confidently load vehicles at optimum levels to better manage high volume.

**NoPileups** will also provide you with weekly reports delivered to your email inboxes. These reports provide metrics that answer questions such as:

- How closely are we loading cars? You will likely develop a company standard for this, but these reports will tell you if it is being followed and if retraining may be needed.
- How much productivity am I losing to conveyor downtime? NoPileups breaks downtime into categories so you can better identify what is causing it so you can fix the issues.
- Where are the high-risk areas in my tunnel? You may notice, for instance, that cars tend to hop rollers at a specific place in the tunnel. This could indicate a problem with the conveyor. Once you fix that issue, you eliminate that source of conveyor stops.

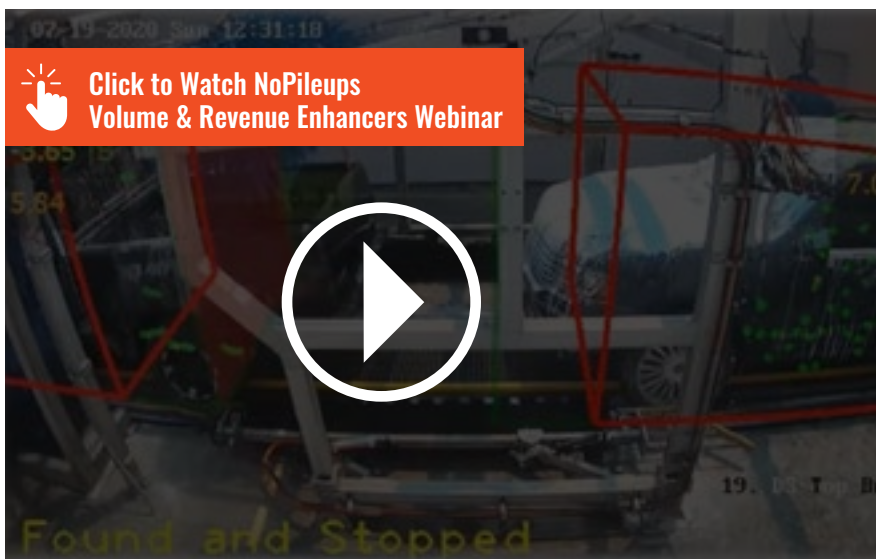
These reports will also allow you to compare multiple sites. You'll be able to see underperforming sites where you might want to increase marketing efforts. Or you may identify a site that is doing particularly well and duplicate their processes to boost performance at other sites.



**“Essentially it pays for itself, stopping the incidents, and then you get additional revenue keeping your car wash up and running as much as you possibly can on a busy day. You can’t replace what you don’t wash, so if you have a line of cars and the car wash is stopped for 10 minutes, that’s 20 cars that you didn’t wash that day.”**

**- Carl Howard  
COO | Autobell**

 [Click to Watch How Autobell Car Wash Increased Uptime with NoPileups](#)



## CarPics® - Increase Productivity, Accuracy and Efficiency

The faster your crew can make adjustments on the fly, the faster they can process cars and the more they can wash every day. Therefore, having advanced queuing technology is key to managing your volume and keeping revenue flowing.

CarPics Touch displays pictures of each queued car on a large screen, allowing loaders to quickly adjust queue positions, apply retracts and report any pre-wash damage with the touch of a finger. CarPics also saves retracts for plan members, so you don't need to set the retracts the next time the member visits. They also help attendants monitor wait times so they can cut down prep time during peak hours.

### Maximize Your Wash

One of the fun things about the car wash industry is there are always ways to improve and drive more volume and revenue. Using these tools and services will help you do that. These tools will also allow you to increase revenue while potentially reducing costs; a magic combination to maximize your investment returns.



# XII. Operational Excellence

Creating a culture of operational excellence is critical to any new car wash business joining the increasingly competitive car wash industry. You can achieve operational excellence by refining your processes, tracking performance and replicating success. The faster you can do this, the sooner you'll achieve your investment goals.

To help get you started, here are five pillars of operational excellence along with how they apply to the car wash industry and how DRB® can help.

## Business Agility

An agile business is one that can adapt to market opportunities and threats in a cost-effective and efficient manner. Often, your point-of-sale technology can inhibit how quickly your business can adapt. DRB's new Patheon™ platform enables nimble modifications to your point-of-sale system so you can quickly respond to these opportunities and threats. Set up new products, unlimited plans or discounts and push them to all of your sites with ease.

DRB's Patheon platform also gives you access to Deputy, a best-in-class scheduling and timeclock software that makes it easy to forecast labor needs and eliminate employee downtime.

## Customer Experience

How you meet and exceed customer expectations around all your brand touchpoints is critical to long-term success. This includes the quality of your wash, the intuitiveness of your customer-facing technology, the friendliness of your employees and how you react to customer complaints.

At DRB, we are obsessed with delivering technology that fades into the background and that provides an omni-channel experience for your customers. DRB's Essential Web Application is one example. Consumers enjoy the features of a modern web-based store with the benefits of a mobile experience when buying washes and plans online. When they drive up to a DRB



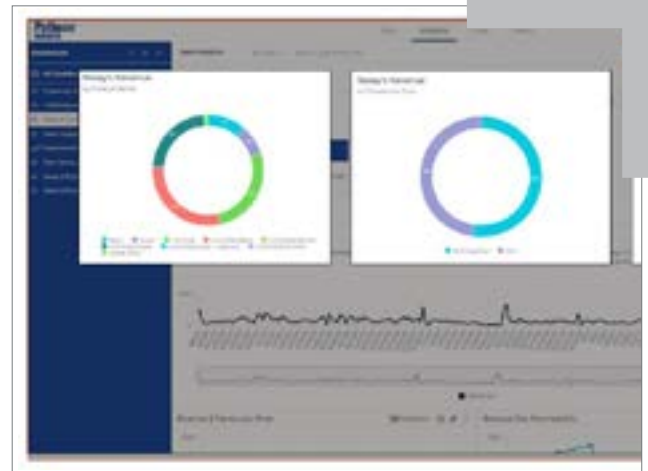
kiosk, they will get a similar experience to the Essential Web Application. The technology helps guide them and provides a consistent brand experience.

Be sure to think about all the ways customers may interact with your brand and make sure they are consistent.

## Visibility, Predictability and Scalability

Data is the key to operational excellence. DRB has some important tools that help you leverage data in the following areas:

- **Visibility** – You can't improve what you can't see. We make your goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) visible to you and to the employees who impact them. DRB's new Patheon Insights business intelligence platform arms you with the reports and dashboards you need, where and when you need them.
- **Predictability** – Suds Creative™ has analyzed data from more washes than any other agency. This gives Suds a unique ability to use data to help predict how your sites should perform based on location and demographics.
- **Scalability** –When the data reveals successful products, plans and promotions, DRB's Patheon platform allows you to replicate and push them down to new sites with the click of a button. Patheon can also group your washes in regions to make regional promotions and reporting possible.



## Fast, Reliable Service

A key component of operational excellence is making sure your wash is reliably up, running and serving customers as quickly as possible. To do so, consider the following recommendations:

- Select reliable equipment and technology.
- Implement preventative maintenance schedules for your wash equipment to eliminate equipment failures.
- Utilize NoPileups™ a tunnel management system that protects cars across the entire length of the tunnel. It automatically stops the conveyor when a collision threat is detected and takes a 15-20 second video so you can identify the cause of an issue. This allows you to wash more cars safely and prevent collisions that could shut down your tunnel.
- Install pay stations so busy customers can serve themselves.
- Consider members-only lanes so those on unlimited plans aren't stuck waiting behind pay-as-you-go customers.



## Financial Performance

Optimizing your assets and resources will deliver strong financial results, accelerate growth and provide you with a competitive advantage. DRB helps customers sweat their assets in the following areas:

- Attracting customers – Get customers to your wash and convert them to plan members with the proven methods implemented by Suds Creative.
- Increasing volume and maximizing uptime – As Suds Creative increases your wash volume, DRB's technology, such as license plate recognition, RFID tags, Xpress Pay Terminals®, CarPics® Touch and NoPileups, can help you effectively manage it. We also offer 24/7 emergency technical support through our Knowledge Center.
- Optimizing your wash – TunnelWatch® 5, DRB's tunnel control software, gives you unprecedented control over your equipment. The technology helps you lower the cost of doing business, enhance wash quality and achieve greater customer satisfaction.

## Operational Excellence is Within Your Reach

Car washes in pursuit of operational excellence take a systematic approach to business and operational processes. DRB and Suds Creative are partners who make it easier for you to understand and implement such practices.

# XIII. POS and Marketing ROI

You have probably already decided that unlimited memberships are going to be a part of your car wash's go-to-market strategy. If not, you may want to go back and read **Chapter VIII** on creating irresistible unlimited wash programs.

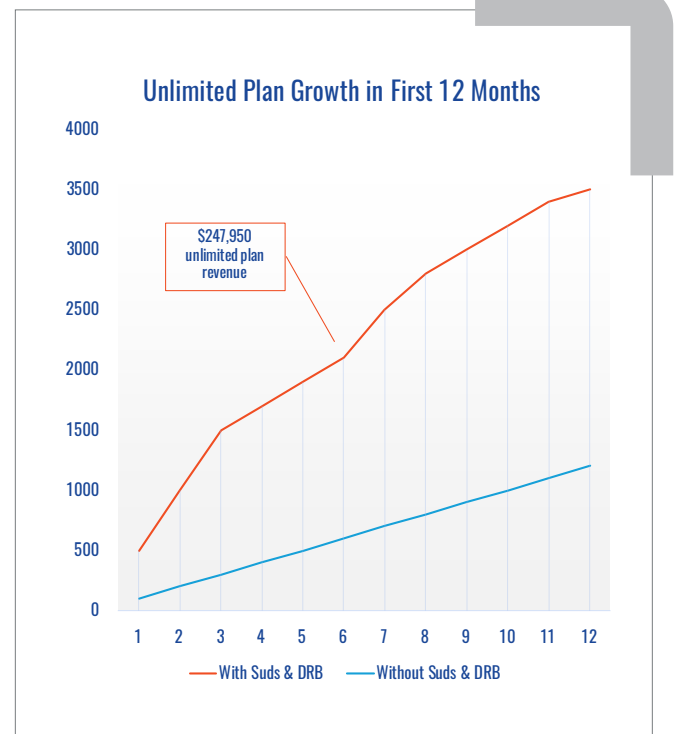
After working with many successful car wash operators over the years, we've noticed that capturing the maximum number of unlimited plans in the first few months can greatly increase revenue and quickly offset the investment made in point-of-sale and marketing. In other words, the faster you build your unlimited wash plan membership, the faster your wash will become profitable.

## A Closer Look

With Suds Creative focused on helping you ramp-up your unlimited plan memberships starting in month one, you can expect over 2,000 memberships by month six, conservatively. With an average unlimited plan price of \$28.50\*, you will have collected \$247,950 in revenue during the first six months in unlimited memberships alone, more than covering expenses on POS and marketing for the full year!

After year one, less than 8% of your unlimited plan memberships will cover the average monthly expenses from your POS and marketing efforts. While we know there is more to your total car wash investment than a point-of-sale platform and marketing, with numbers like that, your memberships should more than cover your other expenses, making any single-sale washes gravy.

Your actual spend will fluctuate depending on the details of your car wash site. Perhaps the most variable cost is advertising spend. The experts at Suds Creative do not experience much fluctuation on ad spend regionally; however, there are some seasonal fluctuations to consider. For example, advertising during the holidays or during a Presidential election can drive up digital ad prices. A good rule of thumb is to plan to spend \$8,000-\$12,000 in media for the first three months. If you are launching during the holidays or an election, plan to spend a little more.



\*Average plan price for Suds Creative customers.

## Without DRB® and Suds Creative™

Let's look at what you could expect without utilizing the technology and expertise of DRB and Suds Creative. Most car wash pro formas shoot to have 1,000-1,200 memberships in a 12-month period. Combine that with an average unlimited plan price of \$25.00\* and your revenue dollars are significantly less. While your costs may be less, your profit dollars generated with DRB and Suds Creative will be so significant that paying more for better technology and expertise is well worth the investment.

## Making It Happen

Hopefully, this example gets you excited about your potential ROI as a car wash operator. Keep in mind, though, that these membership numbers don't just happen. They take a concerted effort and expert marketing strategies.

Fortunately, you don't have to do it alone. With DRB and Suds Creative by your side, you can turn our decades of industry experience into your own "beginner's luck."

\*Estimated average plan price for non-Suds customers.

# XIV. Car Wash Industry Resources for Investors

A common sentiment among people who are new to the car wash industry is that they never realized how much went into washing cars. When you pass by a wash or even drive through, you don't think about all of the components that make it work: pay stations, tunnel equipment, chemistry, a strong team, etc.

This can quickly turn opening a car wash from an exciting business venture to a daunting challenge. But don't be discouraged. The car wash industry is an engaged community with a wealth of resources to help you as you get started and all through your car washing career.

## Industry Associations

Industry or trade associations are usually non-profit organizations that bring together operators and suppliers in a certain industry. Members have access to conferences, educational materials, research and additional resources. An industry association also usually serves as a spokesperson and advocate of the industry to the media, investors, governmental agencies and more.

There are many industry associations car wash operators can participate in

- **International Carwash Association® (ICA)**
- **Southwest Carwash Association**
- **Western Carwash Association**
- **Southeastern Carwash Association**
- **New England Carwash Association**
- **Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association**
- **Midwest Carwash Association**
- **Heartland Car Wash Association**
- **Carwash Association of Pennsylvania**
- **Connecticut Carwash Association**
- **New York State Car Wash Association**
- **Canadian Carwash Association**

## Industry Trade Shows and Events

Trade shows are an excellent way to get information and meet potential vendors, distributors and active car washers who can help you as you start your journey.

Most of these events are hosted by the car wash associations. It should be no surprise that the ICA hosts the largest one: The annual **Car Wash Show™**. This is a must-attend trade show that typically attracts upwards of 9,000 car wash professionals. The ICA also hosts shows in Australia, China and Europe.

Many regional associations also hold their own trade shows, as well as roadshows, car wash tours, seminars and more. Many industry suppliers hold **events** as well.

## Publications and Blogs

Many industry associations also have publications and blogs with informative articles, research, videos and more on everything related to car washing. Additionally, there are some independent organizations and vendors that write on the industry.

For instance, DRB® has its own blog and shares articles and other resources in a monthly newsletter called *The Soapbox*. Be sure to **subscribe** so you don't miss any content. We also provide webinars on a variety of car wash topics.

Some other industry publications/blogs to check out include:

- **Professional Carwashing & Detailing (PC&D)**
- **Auto Laundry News**
- **Car Wash Magazine (ICA)**

Additionally, there are a number of car wash social media groups and online forums where operators share their ideas, struggles and humor. These forums are a place to ask questions and to make connections.

## Carwash Consultants & Distributors

There are many businesses whose sole job is to help car wash operators. There are consulting agencies that you can engage with to help you with market research, site selection, site planning, business planning and more. Distributors are another great source of information. Distributors sell, install and service car wash equipment. Because of that, they have a wealth of industry knowledge that they can share with you.

## Other Operators

The common thread between most of these sources is that they connect operators. Networking is important in any industry, but car washers seem to take it to another level. They have soap running through their veins, and they are more than willing to share information.

Use the previous resources to build a strong network of fellow car washers who will make themselves available for advice and comradery. They may also invite you for a site visit, which can be an invaluable experience as you get started.

# XV. Get Started with DRB®

For over a third of a century, DRB's journey has been about helping entrepreneurs discover the American dream of running and growing a business. We supported – and often drove – an unprecedented era of growth in the car wash industry. We've helped operators limit weather impacts with unlimited wash plans, improve customer experiences with advanced technology and tap hidden growth potential with uptime and monitoring services.

We would love the opportunity to help you do the same with your new business.

## Together We are DRB

DRB has joined some of the most powerful brands in the car wash industry. Together, we work toward a singular goal: To help car wash operators squeeze every ounce of profitability out of their businesses. We do this with:



Data insights and solutions that predictably drive throughput and revenue.



Reliable, intuitive software and hardware innovations that delight consumers and are secure, simple to service and easy to use.



Best-in-class support team, available 24/7 and passionate about keeping car washes running and optimized.

## Our family of brands includes:

### DRB Tunnel Solutions

Trusted by more top 50 conveyor car wash chains than all other technology providers combined, **DRB Tunnel Solutions** provides the point-of-sale and tunnel optimization solutions car wash operators need to achieve long-term growth.

### DRB In-Bay Solutions

Formerly known as Unitec®, **DRB In-Bay Solutions** has been providing innovative point-of-sale technology and optimization services to the unattended in-bay automatic and C-Store car wash market since 1983.



**Suds Creative™** is an analytics, software and design-driven car wash marketing agency that drives customer revenue and profit.

We would love to help guide you along your car wash journey. Get started today by scheduling a free consultation with one of our car wash industry experts.





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