

Setting up an express detail operation

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The benefits of operating an express detailing operation or services are obvious for any detail shop or carwash operator. But how do you go about setting up your express detail operation?

Well, for starters, the following are requirements for a high volume Express Detailing operation:

- Space;
- Equipment;
- Chemicals;
- Supplies;
- Personnel; and
- Management.

Space

To operate an express detailing operation in any carwash requires a minimum of two bays. With two bays and four attendants you can turn out a minimum of eight to 12 cars per hour, depending on the services sold. Two bays is a minimum, whether you should have more than two bays is determined by your carwash volume.

For example, if you wash 500 cars per day and sold 10 percent of your customers an express detail service, you have the potential of doing 50 express services a day. Like your carwash business, the volume will not be consistent from hour to hour. You might be slow one hour and slammed the next hour. So it is critical to balance the amount of space allocated for expressing detailing to the volume of your carwash.

Keep in mind also, that the ability to perform the express services quickly will result in greater volume.

Believe it or not, operators are always saying to me, "I really don't need more than one bay and one person, because we do not have the volume to justify more." What the operators don't realize is the fact that they are responsible for the lack of volume by their attitude and failure to allocate the necessary space for the potential volume.

Equipment

The amount of equipment you have or do not have, like space, will also affect the volume your express detail operation will enjoy. You cannot have a high volume express operation with an orbital, one extractor and a few bottles of chemicals.

To perform a complete service in 15 minutes with two attendants, they must be working simultaneously on both sides of the car. This means double the equipment.

For example, if an operator has two bays dedicated to express detailing services, they should have the same equipment in between both cars; on the right side and on the left side. Now four people can work on two vehicles simultaneously.

If the equipment is not setup in this way you will have workers waiting for the extractor; orbital, etc.

This is a waste of paid manpower. You will lose revenue-producing volume and make customers wait longer than they should.

It is a classic case of "tripping over dollars to save dimes." You are paying for the equipment without receiving the benefits of increased productivity and decreased labor expenses.

Minimum equipment requirements

For a simple express detailing operation you will need the following equipment:

- Soil extractors on each side of every vehicle;
- Wet/dry shop vacuums on each side of every vehicle;
- Rotary Shampoo tools for carpets;
- Orbital waxers to apply wax; and
- Detail work carts.

Portable detailing equipment

For a more organized and efficient express detailing operation you can choose the portable express detailing machines that feature the following:

- Internal heated soil extractor;
- Internal wet/dry vacuum;
- Dispensing of four chemicals;
- Chemical dilution system;
- Spray gun wax applicator of wax or paint sealant;
- Mini orbital waxer;
- Rotary shampoo tool;
- Air lines to power air tools and blow out interiors; and
- Detail work carts.

For the most efficient express detailing operation you should have a portable detailing cart on each side of every car. So, as mentioned above, you would need a unit in the middle and one on the left and right of the vehicle allowing two people to work simultaneously on each car.

Permanently mounted detailing equipment

For operators who are more committed to express detailing or who build an exit-end express detailing operation, you may want to consider installing permanently-mounted express detailing equipment that provide the following:

- Heated soil extractor;
- Wet/dry vacuum;
- Dispensing of 6 or more chemicals;
- Automatic chemical dilution and dispensing system;
- Spray gun wax applicator;
- Rotary shampoo tool(s);
- Mini orbital waxer;
- Air lines to power air tools and blow out interiors;
- Two air lines to power air tools; and
- Detail work carts.

There are two reasons:

a) Purchase equipment that increase productivity, and

b) Reduce labor.

If equipment does that, then it pays for itself.

Supplies

Because express detailing is typically limited to a few services, the demand for supplies is relatively small. The following is a list of necessary detailing supplies:

- Plastic floor mats;
- Plastic seat covers;
- Scrubbing pads;
- Dressing applicator pads;
- Detail brushes;
- Detail toothbrushes;
- Mini orbital waxer terry bonnet;
- Nylon scrub brushes;
- Towels;
- Paint and tar scrapers; and
- Steel wool.

Personnel

In an express detailing operation, experienced detailers are unnecessary. This is because of the following:

Their experience is only good if you let them do what they want.

- They often are the unemployable, transient workers who are not stable;
- They do not understand the concept of express maintenance detailing services; and
- They are used to working "by the car" at their own pace, whereas your express operation is high volume with quality.

Personnel to hire for a carwash express operation are those with good values, who want to work, and who are trainable and motivated. Then you can teach them what you want them to do.

Depending on the volume of your express detail operation you can have express detail employees only, and/or you can cross train people to work in both the carwash and the express detail operation. If you have a high volume carwash with predictable daily carwash volume you can easily anticipate what you will do in the express detail area and staff accordingly.

Employ a certain number of people trained to work only in the express area and a few of your better carwash people cross-trained to help out on days when you are extremely busy.

Pay

Operators constantly ask how to pay express employees. Assuming you have some very good employees, I would pay them hourly and pay them a little more per hour than your carwash workers. This will motivate your carwash employees to want to "move-up."

Set a mandatory program standard of two express services per person per hour. That is two services per hour per person. And, if you have two person teams on a car then they should process four cars per hour.

However, if they can process one more service per hour then give them a \$5 bonus. Why so high? Do the numbers.

If you make an extra \$35 gross on the service, at most you would have a \$10 cost in this service. That means an additional \$25 revenue to you, because the worker(s) did one more car. If you give them \$5 you are still putting \$20 more net revenue in your pocket. And, at \$5 per additional car you will have a real motivated employee who could make up to \$40 to \$50 more per day. That is an incentive, and it is possible to achieve if they work hard.

Management

The final and most important part of an express detail program is management. There can be three levels of management:

Express Detail Manager. This would be a working person who knows exactly the procedures you want followed and the time standards expected. He must be able to hire, train and motivate the people. He can be paid by the hour and given an incentive by how many cars and revenues over the two services per man-hour the entire department can achieve. He needs to have management skills not detailing skills.

Carwash General Manager. If your wash operates with a GM then it will be his/her responsibility to insure that all of the standards and procedures in the express detailing area are being met. This includes procedures, time standards, volume and general employee attitude and conduct.

He/she should meet weekly with the department manager to review the performance of the area. It is absolutely critical that the GM buy into the express program and not let it get lost in operating the carwash which can, and often does happen in many carwashes across the country.

Carwash Owner. If you have no GM, then you must assume a dual role. If you have a GM then you need to review his/her performance with regard to the express detailing area in terms of things mentioned above. He/she should be on top of the service writers to insure they know how to sell the services and that they are, in fact, doing so. It is critical that you buy into the express detail area and convey that to everyone who works at the carwash.

Summary

There you have it — the benefits of exterior washing with express detailing, and what you need to do to make it work. If you are considering a revision of your current full service operation to an exterior wash or considering building a new carwash you should definitely add express detailing services.

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