

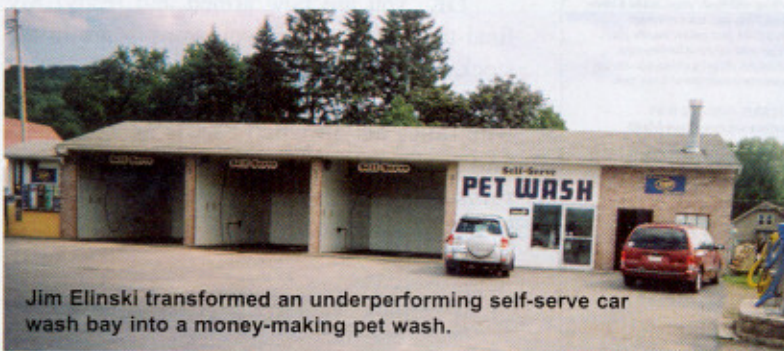
Pet Profits

Dog wash bay completes transformation of rural Pennsylvania car wash

by Dottie Hopkins



Jim Elinski is an entrepreneur. Like many in the car wash industry, he had always wanted to own his own business—a dream that came to fruition when he bought the Pro Wash Car Wash in Bradford, Pa. nearly six years ago. But the car wash that he bought does not resemble the business that he is currently operating on the same location. The latest change—adding a dog wash—is further proof of Elinski's entrepreneurial spirit, and his family-centered values.



Jim Elinski transformed an underperforming self-serve car wash bay into a money-making pet wash.

Out with The Old ...

When Elinski purchased the original car wash it included eight self-service bays and a tunnel wash which were housed in three separate buildings. The tunnel wash, which Elinski described as “dilapidated,” was the first to go—it is now the home of a drive through beer store. He also installed touchless automatics in two of the bays, leaving him with six self-serve bays.

But one of the self-service bays didn't seem to be used as often as the others. Perhaps that was because it was a pull-in and back-out variety. Or maybe it was the location—being the farthest from the change machine, and farthest from the vending it was not terribly convenient. Regardless of the reason, “No one used it except on the busiest days,” recalls Elinski.

That prompted him to consider options which would spur more usage of this bay. After his mentor installed a pet wash in an Altoona, Pa. car wash Elinski started doing some research.

He figured that the cost to transform the original 16-foot by 32-foot bay into a 16-foot by 16-foot dog wash (with room for future expansion) would be about \$20,000. At that level, Elinski determined that he'd need \$400 per month in income, or about three or four dogs per day to make it feasible. “When I started out we were averaging over \$1,000 per month,” he states. “September and October have been the busiest times—when we average \$1,600 to \$1,700 per month.” January and February, which Elinski thought would be among the busiest since pet owners would not want to be washing their animals outside at home, have turned out to be among the slowest times. Yet even these are bringing in \$400 to \$500 per month.

Weather certainly has a major impact on the seasonality of the pet wash business—especially in an area that stays frozen throughout the winter months. “In the fall there is a lot of mud and muck for dogs to get into,” muses Elinski. “It is amazing how often the de-skunk option gets used!”

Options available to dog owners include regular shampoo, flea and tick shampoo, de-skunk shampoo, oatmeal shampoo for dogs with dry skin, conditioner and a blow dryer. There is even a triple column vending machine from which owners can buy dog treats or terry-cloth towels.

The dog wash costs \$5 to start—and is operated by the same tokens which operate the touchless automatic bays. For a \$5 token owners get 10 minutes of time—which is plenty of time to clean a good sized dog, like



Watching families wash the family pet has been a side benefit of adding a pet wash. On the revenue side, Jim Elinski makes about three to four times more than he figured he'd need to break even (in most months).

Elinski's 90-pound black Lab. "Unless the dogs is really filthy, 10 minutes is ample time to wet them down, shampoo, rinse, flea-and-tick it, shampoo again, and then add conditioner before blow drying," concludes Elinski. A leash clip is included so that the dogs are stable throughout the process.

Most of the dogs which benefit from the new dog wash are bigger dogs—Labs, German Shepherds, Rottweilers, and other large breeds. Sometimes owners will bring in two or three smaller "lap dogs" but most often it's the big dogs that frequent the facility.

The facility is fairly rural, but that does not deter people from driving great distances to use the new dog wash. "We have one customer who owns a kennel and sometimes needs to ship a dog or get them ready for sale," says Elinski. "She'll come in and wash the dog and her car in the same trip. She had been using a facility closer to her kennel, which is almost an hour-and-a-half from here, but it was not heated and she did not like their inconsistency. Here the water is always 85-degrees, and the bay is heated for the comfort of both dogs and their owners."

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The pet wash uses the same tokens as the touchless automatics—a controlled circulation CT121 from TokensDirect valued at \$1 each.

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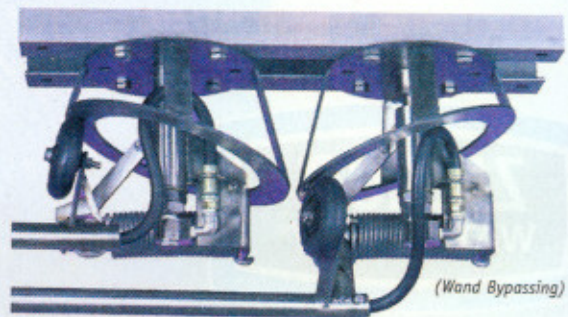
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The facility is fairly rural, but that does not deter people from driving great distances to use the new dog wash.

More than Token Savings from Token Operated Dog Wash

Operationally, Elinski has chosen to operate the dog wash with the same tokens which he used to activate the touchless automatic bays. "It is \$5 for a basic car wash, and \$5 to start the dog wash, so I figured that I could use the same token for both."

He gave away tokens to help promote the touchless automatics as well as the dog wash—in places like the SPCA, pet shops and veterinarian offices. Elinski figured that people with dogs might wash their pets for free and then pay for a car wash, or vice-versa. The strategy seems to be working, as all facets of the business are busy well beyond the break-even point. In fact, Elinski is already considering adding a second dog wash station, likely another Kleen-Rite.

To help incent volume purchases, Elinski, who is the only one that handles money at the facility, gives customers a bonus for volume orders. "At Christmas time or Father's Day or Mother's Day we see people buying \$50 worth of tokens—so I'll give them an extra \$10 in tokens, or a free car wash," he explains. Customers who purchase five of the \$5 tokens receive an extra token—or \$30 worth for spending \$25.

Naturally handling a single token rather than 20 quarters is much easier on both customers and the Pro Wash staff. Customers can feed a single token in and then spend the remainder of their time pampering their pet—rather than having the oatmeal shampoo drying

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In addition to the pet wash, Elinski's operation also includes self-serve bays, and touchless automatics.



on Fido's dry skin because the owner is rooting around for more quarters. A hiatus in the de-skunking process would be far worse (at least for the owner).

"We have a bill acceptor which is pretty convenient, however it doesn't always work well with wet money," says Elinski, who

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While the financial ramifications of adding a successful dog wash have certainly been rewarding for Jim Elinski, the one positive aspect that he had not counted on was seeing families come together to wash the family pet.

surmises that this also prompts people to buy tokens the next time around.

The tokens which he uses for both the touchless automatics and the dog wash station are bi-metallic CTX type tokens from Van Brooke. "They made sure that there was no one within a 50-mile radius of us," recalls Elinski.

While the financial ramifications of adding a successful dog wash have certainly been rewarding for Jim Elinski, the one positive aspect that he had not counted on was seeing families come together to wash the family pet. "People bring their kids and the whole family comes out to wash the dog—much more so than a car wash," he says. "The kids favorite activities seems to be spraying and blow-drying rather than scrubbing—but they are clearly more engaged than if they had stayed home. It is great to see the whole family having fun together."

And it is great to see the entrepreneurial spirit rewarded. Customers who had been to the old-version of Pro Wash may not recognize it now—primarily because of the increased volume of people frequenting the beer store as well as the car and dog washes. ♦

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