



Creative marketing has helped Wally Wash, in Oklahoma City, continue to grow.

Marketing for Wally Wash is More than a Token Effort

TOKENS OFFER A MULTITUDE OF MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

George Brown has learned a few things about operating a car wash over the years—especially about the importance of marketing. While car wash marketing does not have to be flashy or high-tech, it does have to be undertaken on an ongoing basis. Brown is quick to try a new approach—and alter it depending upon the results and customer feedback. And he is not shy about adopting other people’s ideas to suit the needs of his eight self-service bays or his express exterior tunnel wash. That devotion to marketing has helped the Oklahoma City Wally Wash to grow despite challenging times.

While Wally Wash is new to the Oklahoma City scene, Brown established it with lessons learned from more than two decades of car wash experience. He owns a pair of self-serve car washes—a six-bay model and a seven-bay version. Both have operated strictly on quarters for the past 22 years.

“I have consistently been frustrated with people who get \$10, \$15 or \$20 worth of laundry change,” says Brown. “When you have quarters, laundry people, cab drivers, pizza delivery people all come to your establishment to get quarters. So low and behold, on Saturday morning you’re running low,” recalls Brown. “So you have to run out early to refill the quarters. You are literally a drive-through money exchange for laundry. So with the new car wash, I figured I’d go to tokens and get rid of quarters.”

Wally Wash, the newest addition to Brown's stable of self-serve car washes, boasts eight self-service bays and an express exterior tunnel. Each bay accepts tokens, which are available from the centrally located credit card machine. "I limited myself to an in-the-wall credit card machine," says Brown, who was worried about both cost and vandalism if he were to install in-bay credit card machines.

When estimating costs for dollar acceptor, credit card machine, and quarter acceptors for each bay, Brown surmised, "Each meter box can contain up to \$5,000 worth of mechanisms to handle a transaction."

Aside from the cost, Brown was worried about the exposure that such an investment might mean for his business operations in the face of potential vandalism. "If a vandal hits your six-bay car wash on a late night drunk he can add up to \$30,000 in damages with a sledge hammer and a few minutes! Limit your exposure with just one outlet in the wall."

Once Brown had decided on the means of transacting business at this new car wash, there was still the problem of drawing people in to the site.

Seasonal Marketing Draws in Customers All Year Long

One aspect of that answer came from the same means of transaction—tokens. Rather than using standard brass quarter-based tokens, Brown opted for high-security tokens which would eliminate cross-acceptance of competitor's tokens. With the site name and address imprinted on one side and the value (\$1) imprinted on the other, Brown in effect had an ongoing marketing effort inherent in his tokens. That is because customers typically purchase more tokens than they use in a single session, so they hold onto them until the next time. During the interim, these tokens serve as a branding tool—reminding customers to return to Wally Wash—each time that they are seen with pocket change, in the cup holder, on the dresser or wherever loose change is kept.

In addition to this not-so-subtle and ever-present branding effort, Brown engages in seasonal marketing as well. He figures that these themed promotions keep the car wash experience fresh for repeat customers as they look forward to the latest promotion. Hopefully these efforts will entice new customers to come back, too. And frankly they can fill a need for customers—the Christmas promotion was a great case in point.

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How many of us find it difficult to buy the right present for someone. We all know that person who has everything—perhaps it is a parent, an aunt or uncle, or maybe a friend or co-worker. Perhaps they are older and can't get around like they used to. With that in mind, Brown bundled 20 car wash tokens, packaged them in an attractive silk bag about three-inches square which he purchased in bulk from the Oriental Trading Company—an online and catalog retailer. He tied the bag with a gold ribbon and affixed a Wally Wash business card which serves as a gift tag.

In essence Brown says he used tokens to “create a gift to give someone who already has everything.”

“These bags of gold sold really well to people whose parents were seniors. They want to get a senior into an express car wash because they don't have to get out of the car, of course they don't have to tell them that,” continued Brown.



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The \$20 sale amount seems to work well on a couple of fronts. It is not a terribly expensive gift at that level, and it can provide two or three car washes, because the prices for an exterior tunnel wash are \$6, \$8, \$10 and \$12.

He also had requests to make up bags with larger quantities of tokens. "If someone asks for a gift bag with 100 tokens, we're sure going to make one for him," chuckled Brown.

Holiday themed promotions, like giving away a treat-filled Easter egg with each premium tunnel wash, are a fun way to keep customers engaged and to keep them coming back.



Another holiday-themed promotion which Wally Wash undertakes is giving away Easter eggs for customers who purchase a top-of-the-line \$12 wash. Brown purchased a quantity of plastic Easter eggs and then filled them with various items—including candy, a couple of tokens, or a certificate for a free wash. Brown sees this as a way to reward his top-tier customers, as well as to up-sell customers from the lower levels. Pleased with the results from this year's effort, Brown is already planning to implement the Easter egg giveaway again next season.

Lesson Learned Along the Way

While Brown is very pleased with the results he is achieving from his tokens now—both for everyday use and for their role in seasonal promotions—that was not always the case. He distinctly recalls a specific lesson he learned about the value of tokens and their role in paying for various components around a car wash site.

"When we first started using tokens," says Brown, "we purchased a high security token valued at a dollar. I made the mistake of giving these

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away in the tunnel so that customers could get a free vacuum." What he found, however, was that "customers were using them for a self-service vend, a vacuum vend, a towel from the vending machine, because that was the coin of the realm on the entire site, they could use it anywhere."

So he promptly called his token vendor and gave him an earful. "After I chewed out Virgil Vance, he suggested that

High security tokens like these bi-metallic ones, are a memorable way to market your car wash, with the added security that competitors tokens will not work in your facility. Separate tokens to operate the vacuums provide an additional revenue stream while keeping the traffic flowing through the vacuum stations.

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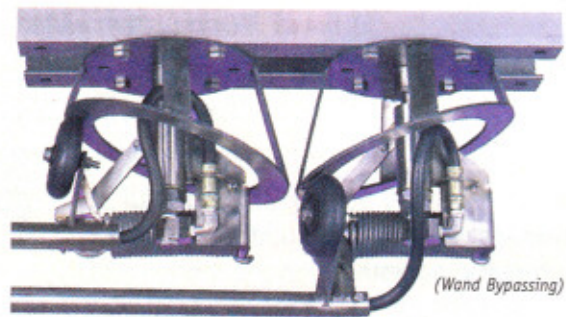
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we dispense a lower value token which could only be used on the vacuums," recalls Brown. So that is what he did. And it has been smooth sailing ever since.

Brown is a firm believer in charging for vacuum services rather than providing them for free. "When you have an express tunnel isolated on one side with free vacuums, people are very likely to pull into those vacuums and pull out everything in their car and spend an hour or hour and a half," he surmises. "But with tokens they are limited to five minutes."

"I've positioned the vacuums such that it creates an air of urgency," he continues. "Let's vacuum and get out of here so the next guy can get in."

If customers want to vacuum for more than their five-minute allotted from their brass tokens, they can buy additional tokens from the cashier, or pay with an alternate method. Brown figures that there are numerous types of customers using the vacuums, so he sets his coin acceptors to accept gold dollars, quarters, the \$1 Wally Wash tokens, and the standard vacuum tokens.

To continue the branding efforts, even at the vacuum stage, the Wally Wash vacuum tokens still include the Wally Wash logo on one side, with a standard vacuum graphic on the other. This, and the size (these are smaller and all brass) clearly differentiate them from the \$1 value Wally Wash tokens.

Even events like the annual 4th of July Parade offer marketing opportunities for token-based car washes, as Brown realized last year. "We're in the parade every year," he recalls, "so for two and one-half miles I dance to the car wash song." Well, last year Brown had recently received an order of 5,000 tokens, so he brought some along. "I'd grab a handful of tokens and throw them to the crowd—that was great because people get tired of candy—all of a sudden they hear coins on the street and figure 'hey he's throwing money.' We gave away about 1,000 tokens during the parade," muses Brown. "Hopefully that will bring in some new business." Plus, it firmly cements Wally Wash as a member of the community to the estimated 23,000 spectators along the parade route.

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Participating in community events, like the annual 4th of July Parade, is a great way to show that your car wash is a part of the community. Tossing out tokens (rather than candy) is also a unique and memorable way to get new customers to visit your facility.

Management by Walking Around

Another token-related marketing effort which Brown is fond of involves his managers and himself, of course. "The wonderful thing about dollar tokens is that an owner or manager can put 10 in his pocket. Then, if meets someone new give them first \$5 free toward a car wash. The name is on the token, so it is a great advertisement, a great way to get people to try the car wash."

He warns, however, that this is a NEW BUSINESS effort. "We want to make sure that the manager isn't using the tokens to wash his own car, and that he doesn't just give the tokens to his friends. The goal is get new people in, and they can do that."

More than Token Profitability

Brown is a firm believer in the value of tokens because he has seen firsthand the increased profitability that they provide. That is because he prices the tokens to reward volume purchases by providing free tokens.

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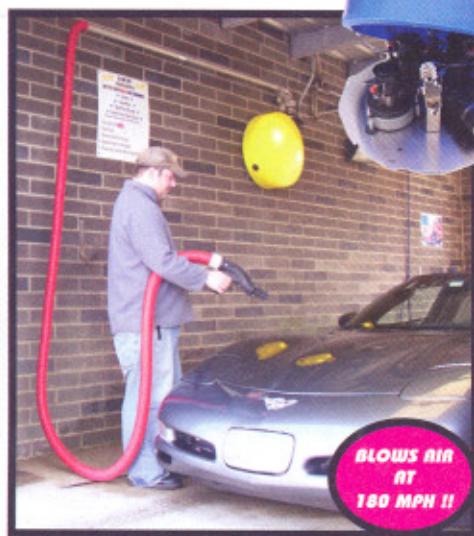
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And the larger the sale, the more free tokens he provides. For example, if you buy \$5 worth, you'll get five \$1 tokens. But if you buy \$10 worth, you actually receive 11 tokens. A \$15 purchase yields 17 tokens, and a \$20 purchase nets the customer 23 tokens—or three bonus tokens.

While this may seem counterintuitive, understand that there is logic and reasoning behind it. People like a bargain—so if they are unsure whether to buy \$5 worth or \$10—they'll probably go with the higher amount to get a bonus token. Then, since they are spending tokens rather than "real money" they are more likely to spend them on site. They may use leftover tokens to purchase something from the vending machine, or for additional self-serve services, or perhaps they'll keep them until next time.

And that is where the extra profitability comes in. Sometimes they lose them. Or they may keep them because they like the design. "I've heard of people using them for ball markers on the golf course," chuckles Brown. "Or people have told me they give them to their grandkids. That is great—we love to hear it!"

High security tokens like the ones that Wally Wash uses typically cost about 30 cents. So for every dollar token that is sold but never redeemed, the car wash nets 70 cents of profit.

So how big of an opportunity do walkaways represent? "I find myself reordering tokens about three times a year," says Brown. "A total of 15,000 tokens a year. That tells you that they are in everyone's console, everyone's change drawer, everyone's dresser drawer—which is great!"

It also tells you that at 70 cents profit per walkaway, there is plenty of money to be had!

Walkaways Found Close to Home (or, There's Money in Them Pipes ...)

Interestingly enough Brown tells an amusing tale of some walkaways which he found very close to home. "These tokens kept disappearing," he recalls, "so one day I went out to one of the more popular self-service bays to get money out of the vaults for the separator. I dropped a token into the meter box but it did not go into the vault. I ran a wire into pipe, and low and behold, masonry workers had a broken pipe inside. For about a year and a half tokens and quarters were building up inside this column. When I finally realized what was happening, it was about three feet deep."

"I figured I'd hit a goldmine," continues Brown. "I took a vacuum and sucked them out and was able to send my wife and daughter to Florida for a week while I kept running this new car wash."

Clearly, tokens can significantly impact your car wash business by providing marketing opportunities which quarter-based operations cannot match. Somehow having a manager walk around with \$10 worth of quarters and giving them to new people would have a greatly diminished impact. Not to mention the fact that you may never see those quarters again!

Add the seasonal marketing efforts and their ability to drive new customers to the site and you can understand why George Brown is sold on tokens. After all, as the number of customers increases, so does the chance for tokens to walk away. At 15,000 "walkaways" per year, that is an added profit potential that cannot be overlooked.

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