

Getting Started in the Car Washing Business: Your Blueprint for Success

By Kris Oliver

So, you're considering entering the car washing business? Good choice. Investing in your own car wash operation is more than a lucrative business prospect; it's a worthy, feel-good endeavor.

Few industries combine a relatively simple operational structure with large-scale, repeating demand and measurable results. For years, many owners operated their car washes more passively, almost as hobbyists. But that has changed. Today's car washes are scalable, sophisticated businesses that generate high margins.

What has contributed to this shift? Technology and customer demand.

People love their cars but are much less likely to wash them on their own driveways these days. With advances in car wash systems designed for convenience and fewer people washing their cars by hand, the general public has accepted car washing as a necessity – and car wash businesses are cashing in.

But those looking to get into the industry and run their own car wash business often raise the same questions:

- Where can I find the best location?
- What kind of equipment and technology do I need?
- What's the best way to market and operate my site?
- What resources can I turn to for help?

The good news is that there are answers to all the above. The *better* news is you don't have to do any of it alone.

Plan Your Car Wash Operation Carefully

This might seem obvious, but it cannot be overstated. Before vehicles line up at your wash, some careful planning is in order.

You'll need a good understanding of the local market and regulations, as well as a scalable marketing strategy – even before installing a single piece of equipment.

But that is where it is important to find the right team that shares your goal for success.

Trusted partners can help you make smart investments in the right technology and develop a customized marketing and operational strategy that will give you a competitive advantage from the start.

The result? High traffic volumes and steady revenue.

“Success in car washing requires the right marketing plan, a good location and optimal equipment for your site’s needs,” said Mark Tentis, Vice President of Global Sales at OPW Vehicle Wash Solutions. “Planning is critical for new investors to help mitigate operational risks and get on the path to profitability from the start.”

Create a Business Plan and Establish Your Site

The right team to help you create a detailed plan and get things started should include the following people:

- A commercial realtor who knows the community and the market to help you find the right location.
- An experienced commercial attorney who can work with local officials.
- An accountant to handle your business finances. The right CPA can help you manage expenses, assist with cost projections, CapEx purchases, lender negotiations, and more.
- A trusted equipment distributor with local market expertise, extensive business experience and comprehensive equipment knowledge. Distributors are expert workhorses at integrating core manufacturer equipment for optimal car wash setups. Work closely with this team member.

If you’re building a new car wash from the ground up, an architect experienced in designing tunnel or In-Bay Automatic (IBA) systems who can help with layout, building size, profit-center placement and utilities is invaluable.

You’ll also want to make sure you hire a general contractor experienced in building car washes, as well as engineers who can evaluate the site to identify potential development or operational challenges.

Equipping Your Car Wash

Once the site is up and running, you’ll need to get people there. In addition to developing and executing your marketing plan, having highly visible, on-site and in-bay signage is a key visual element for attracting drive-by customers. These can include arches, menu boards and branded signs that reinforce your messaging and put your business values, products and services on display.

When it comes to the car wash itself, maximizing uptime and moving traffic along are critical to driving revenue. This emphasizes the need for reliable equipment, including:

- High-performing car wash systems optimized for your site and customers’ needs
- Quality car wash chemistry
- Efficient, user-friendly payment terminals and technology

However, it is important to remember that equipping your car wash for optimal performance isn't just about the nuts and bolts. Here are some key questions to consider while vetting your equipment manufacturers and distributors:

- Do they carry a comprehensive range of equipment?
- Do they have a proven track record of supplying operations like yours?
- Do they have a strong reputation in the industry?
- Do they provide dedicated support before, during and after the sale?
- Can they show they are dedicated to driving your profitability and growth?

"Your equipment provider should provide more than equipment," Tentis explained. "A true partner offers dedicated post-sale support to help you maintain uptime, alongside the industry expertise and strategic insights needed to drive your car wash business forward."

The Right Partners Can Help You Achieve Long-Term Success

Planning, building, opening and operating a car wash can feel daunting when you're just starting. But building the right team can put everything you need to succeed at your fingertips.

"Running a profitable car wash business is never a solo endeavor," Tentis added. "Long-term growth depends on finding trusted industry partners, from equipment manufacturers to chemical suppliers and marketing experts. This is especially important for new operators."

Investing in car washing and running a successful business isn't just about having all the greatest bells and whistles or offering attractive incentives and discounts. It's about making your brand stand out by delivering exemplary customer service and a great wash experience, which starts with connecting with a team who can provide you with:

- Complete car wash systems from well-regarded brands
- Advanced, user-friendly technology to keep customers moving
- High-quality, effective car wash chemicals
- Customized marketing strategies
- Dedicated support and resources

With the right strategic planning and by aligning your car wash business with knowledgeable, reputable partners who are genuinely interested in your growth and success, you can be well-equipped to launch a scalable, efficient, sustainable business from the outset.

Visit opvwvs.com to discover how to find the car wash business partnership that will help you invest in car washing with confidence.

About the Author

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consists of [PDQ Manufacturing, Inc.](#), [Belanger, Inc.](#), [Innovative Control Systems](#) (ICS), [Kesseltronics](#) and [Transchem](#). PDQ is a preeminent provider of in-bay automatic wash systems and payment terminals, while Belanger is an innovative leader in soft-touch tunnel and in-bay automatic wash systems. ICS provides industry-leading car wash technology, like payment terminals, process controls and software management and automation systems, and Kesseltronics designs machine controls for successful tunnel wash operation. Transchem is a leading developer of environmentally sensitive vehicle wash chemicals and cleaning products. Together, they create a revolutionary single source for all vehicle wash needs. For more information on OPW Vehicle Wash Solutions, please visit opwvws.com.