

## How One Operator is Cleaning Up with Vacuum Tokens

There are two sides to every coin. In the debate on vacuum stations, there are certainly advantages to offering free vacuuming—but those freebies might be costing you plenty of cash. That's what Bob Wall of Classy Chassis Car Wash in Pascagoula, Miss. found when he switched from free service to token operated vacuums. Now he makes some serious coins as a result.



Individual vac stations support the 18-bay site.

In addition to the Pascagoula operation, Wall owns and operates car washes in Biloxi, and Ocean Spring, Miss. When he remodeled the Pascagoula operation from a full-service wash to an express wash a little over a year ago, he switched from central vacs to individual coin vacuum stations. Customers receive a vacuum token from the pay station worth \$1 or four-minutes of vacuum time. Customers who are in a hurry, for example, or perhaps do not want to vacuum in the cold, can keep the token and redeem it later. Alternately, customers who need more time can purchase additional time by inserting quarters into the vacuum station.

Wall figured that the revenue generated from the sale of additional time would defray the cost of the units as well as their maintenance. To his surprise, "the vacuums bring in \$600 to \$800 a month, or \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year," says Wall, which is much more than he anticipated.

In addition, the pay-based vacuum stations also keep traffic flowing through the car wash. "There are certain demographics that will hang out and work on their car all day," says Wall. "The token gives them four minutes, so if they want to stay all day, they've got to feed the machine, which brings in money."

Another operational advantage of having individual vacuum stations versus a couple central vacs is redundancy. Wall figures that to support the 18-bays in Pascagoula, he'd need at least two central systems. He estimates that the purchase and operating costs would be similar for both styles, however, "when a central vacuum system goes down, it takes half of your bays with it. If an individual vacuum goes down, you only have a single bay down."

Depending upon how the lot is laid out and how it is lit, operators can allow access to the vacuums 24-hours a day, like Classy Chassis does. That may be why he is seeing more usage than is the industry norm. "Industry rule of thumb says that half of the people leave without vacuuming,



Classy Chassis Car Wash, Pascagoula, Miss., switched from free service to token operated vacuums and is making serious coin as a result.

and we're not seeing that kind of dwindling (or token volume), so I think that they are coming back."

One reason why they may be returning to use Classy Chassis vacuums is that when Wall made his first purchase of 10,000 vacuum tokens, he opted to include their logo and ad message on one side. "They toss the tokens into their ash tray or cup holder and it has our logo and name on it" he says. "So we've got a little advertising for Classy Chassis Car Washes in their car."

While Wall has just one of his three operations using pay-vacuum stations now, he's confident that there will be more in his future. "I believe that I'll do this with the other locations—it is a revenue generator."

Wall is sold on the concept of selling vacuum services rather than giving them away. Switching to vacuum tokens has provided many coins that Wall and his team can take straight to the bank. And it is hard to argue with that kind of success.