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A Bright Idea for Washing Cars

In April of 1998, a new car wash quietly opened in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Unlike conventional "tunnel" car wash buildings, this new wash was made of glass and was brightly lit from the inside. As soon as it opened this new car wash was attracting customers and generating business for its owners, Lassus Brothers Oil.

What was this new glass car wash? Where did it come from? This was the first Lighthouse Carwash, a new concept in car washing that is so innovative it's covered by several patents.

Lighthouse Carwash is the brainchild of Mike Kinslow and Norm Siegel, who each have more than 25 years of experience in the car wash business. "The inspiration for Lighthouse Carwash came from our ongoing search for ways to make car washing more profitable," said Siegel from Lighthouse Carwash System's offices in Indianapolis. "Conventional car wash buildings are dark and uninviting, not very welcoming to customers. Mike and I felt that a brightly lit glass building would not only be more comfortable for its customers, it also would have amazing curb appeal, selling itself and attracting people as they drove by. You could wash more cars, with less effort, which would make you more money."

Kinslow and Siegel's hunches proved correct. Now, in less than four years, there are more than 90 Lighthouse Carwash locations, and the company expects to have nearly 200 by year-end. The reasons for the company's quick success seem clear—owners of Lighthouse Carwash locations are enjoying excellent results, and a number of

them have already built eight or more washes.

There are three main ways that a Lighthouse Carwash location helps its owners make more money:

Lighthouse Carwash brings more customers into a site. As the name "Lighthouse" implies, the brightly lit building acts as a beacon to invite customers in. "Visually, this site sells itself," says Jon Lassus, owner of two Lighthouse Carwash locations, including the first one. "People drive by, not planning to wash their cars, but they see the lit up building and decide to get a wash." Not only are marketing costs lower, but a site with multiple profit centers, such as a convenience store or a fast lube operation, enjoys the benefit of these additional customers throughout all areas of business.

A Lighthouse Carwash location produces more car wash revenue from the customers it attracts. Once a customer visits a fast lube or convenience store site, they are more likely to purchase a carwash, due to the attractive, inviting building. And, because the brightly lit building has a safe, open feeling, there is no reason to close a Lighthouse Carwash at sundown, as with traditional washes. "We get far more nighttime washes at our Lighthouse sites than at our conventional sites, and I'm sure it's because of the visibility," added Jon Lassus. ➤

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Additionally, Lighthouse Carwashes can produce higher average revenues per car than traditional washes. One location, Auto Clean Express in Gastonia, North Carolina, offers washes at \$5/\$6/\$7/\$10 price points, and is enjoying a very healthy revenue of \$6.94 per car. 29% of Auto Clean Express' business is at the \$10 "Supreme" level. "Conventional car washes can't support price points of \$10 or more," said Lighthouse co-founder Mike Kinslow. "The Lighthouse Carwash experience is so much better than what a customer finds in a dark, cinder block building, that our operators are able to charge more, increasing their profits."

Lighthouse Carwash creates customer loyalty. Because the Lighthouse Carwash building is unique, it helps an operator differentiate his operation in a competitive marketplace. Surveys of customers at Lighthouse Carwash's location in Indianapolis show that 60% of customers are repeat users, and 98% indicate an intent to come back. In an era of me-too products and the clutter of an overcrowded marketplace, Lighthouse Carwash gives customers a special reason to return to a site that is otherwise hard to distinguish from the competition.

The Lighthouse Carwash glass building is marketed as a turnkey car wash system with Autec's soft-cloth car washing equipment. Working with Lighthouse and Autec, a complete car wash can be built in a matter of days, not months. The operator has an almost unlimited choice of colors, and the building comes in multiple sizes, in automatic, conveyor and self-serve formats. "Our strategy is to work with operators every step of the way," added Kinslow. "We've done this so many times, we can make it very easy for an operator to get into business."

Lighthouse Carwash has come a long way since that first car wash in Fort Wayne. "It's all about making more money from car washing," says Siegel. "And the word is getting out that we've found a better way." 

Editor's Note: For more information on Lighthouse Carwash, call 1-800-204-4358 or visit www.lighthousecarwash.com.



Lighthouse Carwash is unique with its brightly lit glass building, which is designed to be more comfortable for customers and have curb appeal, selling itself and attracting people as they drive by.