

Become more efficient

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Feature

How Einstein's theory of relativity will improve your tunnel operations.

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All of us are familiar with "E=mc²," but are you aware of the carwash version? Well it's just as simple (just kidding) as Einstein's theory. Except in our case "E" stands for efficiency results, "m" stands for money (net profit), and the "c" stands for cars. The more efficient we are, the greater the results to the bottom line, hence E=mc²!

Endless efficiency

So where does it start? Where does it end? It starts at the beginning. From the very moment you sit down and create a plan that includes a site layout, equipment and building, a design, a business model, services offered, a menu, and basically a very detailed blueprint that covers as many aspects and contingencies you and your team can conjure and remedy.

And like the theory of relativity, efficiency is endless. There is no ending until the business closes. You can forget about the old management adage that says, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." This is a time where the status quo may just put you in the poor house.

Becoming E=mc² proficient is an endless task and nothing is sacred. Everything that occurs in your business should be investigated, objectives established, measurement tools created, and people should be held accountable. Becoming more efficient can be fun, and if presented properly, it can be rewarding to all stakeholders. The bigger the pie, the more to share — how fun is that?

E = Efficiency

With an existing business, to evaluate an "E" quotient start at the point a customer enters your property. How easy is it for them to see your sign, understand it, make a decision and enter? Efficiency is a measurement of time and results. How long does it take once a customer is on your site to read, understand, and make a decision as to the services they want, and purchase?

Much has been written about carwash signage and for good reason. Good signage saves time, which improves efficiency, makes it easier for the customer, and ultimately results in a better bottom line.

If you are an exterior operator, are you using an employee or are you using an electronic cashier or point-of-sale system? Each and every time we can make it faster and easier for our customers to transact business, the greater the throughput.

There is also less opportunity for "partnering" (shrinkage). As in choosing the right equipment to wash vehicles it is equally as important to choose the best entry and control systems.

As an operator, I am blown away by the new equipment in this area that ups throughput efficiency as well as allows us web tools, customer tracking, loyalty programs and controls that were unthinkable just a few years ago.

Be aware of backburner strategies

Over the years, my friend Bobby Willis and I have created a process for evaluating existing carwashes. We always approach each new challenge as a customer entering for the first time: What do we see? How easy is it to obtain services?

After our initial "customer" experience, we walk the site inside and out. We check the equipment rooms, bathrooms, employee areas, offices, and tunnel.

When we're done with that we interview the staff and customers. What are we looking for? Opportunities! Most often, what we find are obvious issues that are known to the owner. They claim they are going to resolve the issue, but haven't found the time. In other words, it's on the backburner. Backburner strategies, besides being very inefficient, are also very expensive.

A few simple rules

So how do we become better and more efficient operators? Here are some simple rules and ideas to improve your $E=mc^2$ prowess.

1. Change is inevitable and is a natural way of weeding out the old, often less efficient ways. Embrace change.
2. Empower and encourage team leaders to suggest ways to eliminate inefficient methods, and reward their ideas.
3. Encourage vendors and suppliers to evaluate your processes, make suggestions, recommend changes, supply validated documentation and testimonials, and evaluate the return on investment.
4. Create a set of easy metrics that will enable you to judge existing processes and evaluate resulting efficiency improvements.
5. Visit and evaluate your competitors as well as some of the best operators who are outside of your marketplace. Compare your metrics to theirs.
6. Get all team members on board; communicate your mission clearly; be sure you get the total buy in; and most importantly, establish a regular and consistent time/method to communicate results.

Track your way to success

For example, I found the tips on a per car basis varied based upon how quickly our customers were serviced and the cleanliness of the vehicle. By tracking this, it gives me a good overview as to the efficiency of certain teams. Same with our service writers; I track sales as well as the average throughput time. In addition, there are the normal metrics of cars per hour, cars per man hour, and labor as a percentage of sales.

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