

Simply the Best

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Posted on: 11/07/2006

 PRINT

Simply the Best Texas operator rolls out the red carpet for customers

By Tracy Charuhas

Not everyone is fortunate enough to own a Lexus or Mercedes. But that fact shouldn't stop the drivers of average cars from getting the best quality and service when caring for their vehicles.

That's the philosophy of Frisco, Texas carwash owner Lance Tyler, who believes everyone deserves the royal treatment—regardless of what kind of car he drives.

Tyler and three partners own AutoSplash Car Care Center, a business that combines flex-serve carwashing, detailing, quick-lube service and emissions testing. When developing the plans for the location, Tyler used the high level of service provided by luxury car dealerships as his inspiration.

"If you've gone into a Mercedes or Lexus dealership, you know the quality and service you receive," Tyler says. "I wanted to carry that over to AutoSplash."

AutoSplash offers customers free Starbucks coffee and free fountain drinks, and if they buy a full-service wash or above they receive coupons for free Chick-fil-A kids' meals for every child who comes into the carwash. But the royal treatment doesn't stop at free food and beverages. The cozy carwash lobby, which has leather chairs, a flat-screen TV and attractive light fixtures, has WiFi access for customers who want to work while waiting for their vehicles.

All customers are greeted by professional employees dressed in 1950s-style jumpsuits with the AutoSplash logo on the back. You won't find any tattoos, earrings or hats on any of the employees. Managers dress professionally in khaki pants and polo shirts.

"Nothing against tattoos, earrings or baseball caps, but I want my people to appear clean and organized," he says. "I've gotten a lot of positive feedback from customers about my employees. People feel comfortable leaving their cars with us."

All employees go through an extensive five-day sales training program after being hired so they have a good understanding of the services provided.



Lance Tyler



The spacious lobby welcomes customers.

"You don't want a service writer who recommends a wax for a car that is badly oxidized," Tyler says. "Service writers need to thoroughly understand everything we can do for customers' cars."

The site

AutoSplash is located on two acres of prime real estate. The buildings are brick and stone facade with standing-seam metal roofs. Tyler spared little expense in building the finest facility he could. The final price tag was more than \$4 million for the land and buildings.

"Two acres is a big site, but we used every square inch of it we could. There isn't room for much more."

Tyler says carwashing is the perfect business. Not only did he want to work in the service industry, but he wanted a cash business that would help service the debt on the property.

Tyler, who has a background in construction, says his experience with zoning boards and architects helped make the building process easier. The project took two years from conception to completion. Not bad considering Frisco is a city with strict zoning laws.

"I just went to the city and said, 'How would you like us to do this?' I didn't go in there and *tell* them what I was going to do."

Traffic flows easily on the property. After entering the site, carwash customers pull up to one of three auto-cashiers. They are greeted by a service writer who welcomes them to AutoSplash. Patrons who choose an express wash ride through the 170-foot tunnel, while those who choose full service exit the vehicle. Express washes are priced at \$4.99, \$10 and \$15. The full-service washes are \$24.95 and \$29.95. An extra \$1 is charged for oversized vehicles or heavily soiled vehicles.

AutoSplash installed a Belanger Dura Trans conveyor in the tunnel as well as Belanger carwashing equipment, which was purchased through Ralph Nasca of Pro-Tech Services, Lewisville, Texas.

When it comes to detailing, Auto Splash can do everything from a \$29.99 express wax to a full showroom detail for \$249. Tyler says you have to "baby step" your customers into trying out new services.

"Before you sell them the showroom detail, you have to prove to them that you're going to do what you say. You have to turn out quality and service. Whatever you sell, you have to deliver," he says.

One year old

AutoSplash opened in September 2005 in an affluent part of the city. Since day one, it has washed an average of 10,000 cars a month. Although Tyler is thrilled with those numbers, he says he's not at all surprised. The wash's great location and service offerings are hard to resist.

"I saw a void in the carwash industry for this kind of quality and service. We're not perfect, but we're very focused on process, quality and service."

Frisco is located about 20 miles north of Dallas right off the toll-way. The city, which is experiencing plenty of growth, is home to the Dallas Stars practice facility, a Texas Rangers farm team and the stadium for the Dallas Burn professional soccer team.

Tyler's partners include his father, Milton Tyler, and friends Bucky Woy and Phil Connor. Tyler serves as the company's operating owner and is on site every day.

"This is a hands-on business," he says. "It has to be when you spend upwards of \$4 million on it."



The site has six managers and more than 40 employees. The carwash and the fast lube each has its own managers and assistant managers. There is also a detail manager and a general manager.

Not your average quick lube

AutoSplash quick-lube customers stay in the car during their service. Since the lube shop also has WiFi access, they can work on their laptops while the service is being done. All customers are offered a free beverage. They can even watch one of the flat-screen TVs located right in each bay. By tuning their radios to a certain station, they can listen to the TV in their cars.

"It works well," Tyler says. "You keep them in the car, you give them great quality and service and you get them out in a convenient manner."

Sitting in your car with the engine off in the hot summer months could be a problem at some quick lubes, but not at AutoSplash. Cool air is pumped into the vehicles through hoses that are connected to a 5-ton air-conditioning unit.

Oil changes are priced from \$29.99 to \$69.99 depending on the service. The fast lube also performs vehicle-emissions testing and battery service and replacement.

Being different

AutoSplash does a few things differently than most carwashes. First, it offers a 10-day guarantee on \$10 and \$15 exterior washes and full-service washes. While this does not cover rain, customers can bring their cars back for any other reason within 10 days and get a free exterior wash or a \$3 credit toward any other wash.

"It's hard for some people to understand this concept at first, but once they do they love it."

Tyler says about half of his customers come back for their free carwash or a \$3 credit. He sees this as an opportunity.

"Let's face it. This is a retention business," Tyler says. "What this does is bring the customer back to your facility within 10 days because it's free. This gives me an opportunity to resell them."

This is also a chance to reward existing customers, rather than spending money mailing out coupons and hoping to receive some of them back.

Another thing AutoSplash does differently is the way it hands cars back over to customers after the service is complete. Instead of having someone wave a towel in the air, AutoSplash has a manager hold up the customer's ticket. No car leaves the property before being inspected by a manager. The manager thanks the customer for his business, reminds him of the 10-day guarantee and sends him on his way.

"We're not perfect," he says. "In having a manager check each vehicle we hope to catch any mistakes we do make and correct them. Customers appreciate that."

Future plans

In the next few years, it won't just be customers in Frisco who get to experience AutoSplash. Tyler says they plan to begin working on their second wash in the next year and hope to grow to five locations in the next few years.

"This is my first time in the industry," Tyler says. "I'm not trying to re-invent the carwash business but take it to another level. I just saw a need [in the industry] to do things a little different."

For more information on AutoSplash, go to www.autosplash.com.