

Doing It Right

Part III Post Construction: An in-depth look at the launch of the Mr. Squeaky Car Wash Franchise



Everything is done. The construction crews have left, the equipment is set up, the employees are hired—all that is left to open your doors to the public. That is where many new car care operators make their mistake. When it comes to the grand opening of a new car care facility, “soft” openings, marketing campaigns and advertising are just a few steps that need to be taken *before* you open your new facility to the public.

During our third article of a three-part series on Mr. Squeaky Car Wash, we will discuss the steps taken after the construction process was complete and before the facility opened its doors to the general public, as well as that vital grand opening.

First Impressions

One of the most important aspects of opening a car care facility that many new operators never think about is the facility’s first impression. When a car wash, or any business opens for that matter, and customers arrive for the first time, a good first impression can be vital to a company’s success. This is one of the reasons that Richard Sasso, owner of the Mr. Squeaky Car Wash Franchise, fully tested his site *before* the wash was ever open to the public.

“After construction was completed on the Mr. Squeaky flagship site, but before we opened our doors to the public, we fully tested the entire car wash system, including the tunnel controller, the tunnel equipment and the chemicals,” says Sasso. “We tested the system by running hundreds of cars through the tunnel. We started with my personal vehicle, which I lovingly labeled ‘the \$3 million car wash.’ We then ran the personal cars of the ICS technician, the Sonny’s equipment installers and my Blue Coral chemical representative through the tunnel.

“Once we had started to run test cars through the tunnel, the process of fixing and tweaking the equipment, calibrating the tunnel controller and its timing functions and dialing in the chemicals really began,” adds Sasso. “We started by working on and fixing the big, obvious issues and problems.”

Sasso says just one example of an equipment issue that became apparent early on involved a 50-inch side washer that was spinning in the wrong direction, which caused damage to the side mirror of a test car, then was immediately noticed and corrected by the installers without causing further damage.

“If this sort of problem would have taken place on a customer’s vehicle, it could have been a disaster,” states Sasso. “This was just one issue that we discovered with our testing runs.”

The timing set up for the ICS tunnel controller also involved a great deal of trial and error. Sasso says his ICS

Working hand in hand with the installers on equipment and computer installations was a great learning process.



technician was very patient and would attack and adjust the timing for each piece of tunnel equipment one by one.

“We started at the front of the tunnel and worked our way to the exit,” he says. “I assisted with this process and was able to learn a great deal about how the tunnel controller worked and how the equipment timing is set up for the entire car wash.”

While the timing was being adjusted on the tunnel controller, the Blue Coral chemical representative, Wayne Herzog, was working on dialing in his products.

“Each chemical arch was fine tuned so that the dilution rate of chemicals was appropriate and to ensure the spray and foam coverage on each car was adequate in the tunnel,” notes Sasso. “By the time Herzog’s work was completed, he had the chemical being applied in the tunnel so it was cost effective and also so that it put on a great foaming show for the customers.”

The entire testing phase, from dialing in the chemicals to reconfiguring the blower set up for optimal drying, involved a great deal of trial and error, testing and re-testing. Sasso says that only once the *entire* team was in agreement that the entire system was dialed in and working smoothly, did the wash begin to run a greater volume of test cars, including the vehicles of friends, family and commercial neighbors. Once this was completed to

satisfaction by washing hundreds of cars over a couple of days, Mr. Squeaky’s doors opened to the public.

Sasso says that during the set up and testing process at Mr. Squeaky, he learned a great deal about what it takes to operate a successful car wash business and suggests other new operators who are considering opening a wash, use the same type of testing period.

“Working hands on with the installers and technicians on Mr. Squeaky’s actual equipment and computer installation was a great learning process for me that brought together the knowledge I had acquired in the preceding months of preparation,” he says. “I observed everything the installers and technicians did to test and re-test the equipment. I took notes so I would remember key points later on. I asked dozens of questions and I pitched in with the actual equipment testing work whenever possible. Troubleshooting and diagnosing problems are skills that I started to develop during the testing process that have come in handy often since opening Mr. Squeaky.”

Sasso says the most important lesson he learned was that being a great car wash operator involves continuous hands-on work, observation and fine tuning.

“While we have our own procedures and established recipes for success at Mr. Squeaky based on our own trial and

error, to consistently put out a clean, shiny and dry car takes continuous and evolving effort, adaptation and attention to detail,” he states. “This is part of the challenge I enjoy so much about operating a car wash.”

Starting Slowly

Mr. Squeaky began service to the public by offering exterior washes only. Sasso says this gave him the chance to get the new crew up to speed with real customers.

“We ironed out any remaining kinks and team training in about one week, then added full-service offerings to Mr. Squeaky’s menu options,” says Sasso. “By taking one step at a time, we had an easy transition for the new employees and were able to offer first class service to our customers each step of the way.”

Mr. Squeaky’s official grand opening weekend was not until about two months after Sasso and his crew ran their first test car through the wash.

“The primary focus of the grand opening weekend was to take care of our existing customers, with the theme being a ‘customer appreciation weekend,’” says Sasso. “Of course, we also met and serviced many first-time customers during our grand opening weekend. All told, the grand opening weekend

was very successful and Mr. Squeaky washed more cars by far than during any weekend prior to that time.”

In preparation for Mr. Squeaky’s grand opening weekend, Sasso says he tried to get the word out in as many different ways as possible.

“We printed fliers to hand out to all existing customers in the weeks leading up to the grand opening. We placed fliers in neighboring businesses, we had radio ads running in the weeks leading up to the event, and we had a live radio broadcast on site and a DJ playing music,” he says. “We created a festive atmosphere, which included music, giveaways and prizes.”

In addition, during the entire grand opening weekend, Sasso ran a specially priced \$5 car wash promotion, which he says helped draw new customers into the driveway to give Mr. Squeaky a try and also built momentum for the new business.

“While I am not a fan of issuing coupons or discounting our great service, having a special price offering during our grand opening weekend was very effective for us,” he says.

In addition to trying out all of the equipment and testing it to make sure that everything is working correctly, Sasso says that it is also important to gauge the customers response and attitude about the new wash after their first visit. He says the best way to accomplish this is to be present as much as possible.



Mr. Squeaky opened their wash offering just exterior washes only, then added other services such as detailing later on.

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—Richard Sasso, Owner,
Mr. Squeaky Car Wash Franchise

“I have been present onsite every day since before we opened to the public,” he says. “I enjoy meeting and interacting with Mr. Squeaky’s customers on a daily basis. This interaction provides me with a direct form of feedback. I am not shy to ask customers how they liked their wash experience.

“I receive many, many praises daily and the very rare complaint,” he adds. “I listen to each complaint and address it. If there is any way to learn from the complaint and prevent a future complaint by modifying something we are doing onsite, we take action.”

One example of this involves the drying of the facility’s express-exterior cars. While these exterior-only washes were coming out very dry by industry standards, Sasso says he did get an occasional complaint during the first couple of months from customers who thought their cars were too wet.

“Due to these complaints, we modified our blower configuration and added different types of blowers to correct this problem and the end result was a dryer car,” he says. “Since the change, I have not received a single complaint about how dry a vehicle is. All members of the Mr. Squeaky team take pride in the continuous praise and positive feedback we receive from our customers. At the end of the day, the customer is the best gauge of how well your car wash is doing. We have a 99.99 percent success rate in customers leaving Mr. Squeaky with a smile on their face ready to return to us the next time they need their car washed.”

When it comes to manufacturer participation in the grand opening of Mr. Squeaky Car Wash, Sasso says that Sonny’s

provided a great deal of support during construction, equipment installation and the testing process; however, once the testing process was complete, their work was done onsite.

“We did not have a Sonny’s representatives on hand to assist with our grand opening weekend,” he says. “We were on our own at this point. Since our grand opening, any problems we have encountered are immediately addressed by Sonny’s and corrected by sending one of their representatives out to Mr. Squeaky.”

When it comes tips that Sasso would give to new operators who are opening a wash for the first time, he says the main tip or encouragement would be that there are no shortcuts to properly establish your new car wash business.

“It is a long road, but at the end, a very rewarding journey,” he says. “Rather than focusing on discounts, coupons or being the cheapest wash in town as most if not all of our competitors do, we focus on being the *best* car wash in the country. Our early success is an indication that we are on the right track and that our efforts are appreciated by our loyal customer base.”

What Does The Future Hold?

The long journey that Sasso has taken in opening Mr. Squeaky Car Wash has taken many twists and turns, but now the process is all about running a successful car care facility.

Mr. Squeaky’s flagship site in Pompano Beach, Fla., has been open for about six months and Sasso says the feedback from customers and bottom line results have been fantastic.

“We have surpassed all the goals I set for Mr. Squeaky before opening with regards to growth, volume and revenue per car,” he says. “It is very rewarding to see the years of hard work I put in before we opened our doors paying off in the success of Mr. Squeaky, and it brings a smile to my face every time a new or existing customer compliments our tremendous service and superior wash quality.”

Since opening the doors at Mr. Squeaky, Sasso has received multiple purchase offers for the business, for individual and multiple franchise units and even for the entire franchise concept. However, he is very focused on the big picture and wants to keep expanding and growing the Mr. Squeaky brand and concept in his local market, followed by growth on a regional and national level.

Sasso says the first step of Mr. Squeaky’s growth will be to develop and grow other company-owned sites in South Florida. At the same time, he would like to pursue expansion through franchise development agreements both inside Florida and throughout the rest of the United States.

“The main method for the future growth of Mr. Squeaky will be through franchise development agreements,” he says. “While I may be able to personally operate four or five company-owned locations, Mr. Squeaky has unlimited growth potential through our future franchisees. I look forward

to working with franchisees who seek the guidance, assistance and support that Mr. Squeaky will provide. The excitement, joy and rewards I feel from having developed the Mr. Squeaky flagship site will be felt again and again as I help each new franchisee to hit the ground running with their new car wash business.”

Sasso adds that Mr. Squeaky will provide each franchisee with the same commitment to excellence that he put forth in developing the flagship site.

“Each franchisee will have the opportunity to work with me directly to set up their specific project, whether it is a single franchise site or a multi-location development agreement,” he says. “By having gone through each and every step in developing the Mr. Squeaky franchise from the ground up, I will be able to save our franchisees both time and money.”

The selection process for new franchisees will be as thorough as Sasso’s own preparation has been in developing the Mr. Squeaky flagship site.

“In order to ensure the success of both the franchise brand and each new franchise site, we will make sure each franchisee is adequately prepared and trained,” he says.



The sky is now the limit for Mr. Squeaky Car Wash Franchise.

“If a potential franchisee does not meet our criteria, they will not be joining the Mr. Squeaky team. We will offer continuous support and guidance to select franchisees, with our ultimate goal being to save each franchisee far more time and money than what is spent in franchise fees. By the time the franchisee is open for business, we are confident the franchise fee will seem nominal, and all future royalties paid will be earned by our ongoing support.”

Sasso plans on personally giving each franchisee his personal attention and dedication to success.

“Mr. Squeaky is not a large, impersonal franchise corporation that is so commonly found these days both within and outside of the car wash industry,” he says. “Each franchisee will become a member of the Mr. Squeaky family and I will be as passionate about their success as I am about my own.”

Sasso says the future for Mr. Squeaky will hold continued growth and a continued commitment to be the best car wash in the country.

“Mr. Squeaky will continue to be a leader and innovator in the car wash industry,” he says. “In June, we were the first car wash to have the comedian and actor Jimmy Fallon on site to raise money for a charity that supports military veterans, holding the first ‘Car Wash for Peace Day.’ Not only has Mr. Squeaky been covered in the local newspapers, we have also been featured on NBC and Fox. Based on our professionalism and the success of the ‘Car Wash for Peace Day,’ Jimmy Fallon and his people are working with us to set up a National Car Wash for Peace Day that will provide tremendous goodwill to our entire industry, while helping out a very worthy and tremendous cause.”

There is no doubt in my mind or that of Sasso’s that Mr. Squeaky will continue to grow their business on the flagship site each and every month. The wash’s volume has increased each month it has been open and Sasso says the facility was at breakeven from day one.

“We reached a profit by our third month in operation,” he says. “The sky is truly the limit for this great new franchise concept. I am thrilled to soon have the opportunity to share Mr. Squeaky’s recipe for success, and my passion for this business and the car wash industry, with our future franchisees.”

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Editor’s Note: This is the third and final article of a three-part series that has followed Sasso through the preconstruction, construction and post-construction phases of opening his car care business. Sasso is the owner/operator of Mr. Squeaky Car Wash, headquartered in Pompano Beach, Fla. For information regarding franchise opportunities, please call (786) 247-7974 or visit www.Mr-Squeaky.com.