

By Dottie Hopkins

Tokens

Provide Freedom and Independence

Dave Lawrence is passionate about the car wash business. On the phone he's willing to share anecdotes to illustrate lessons he's learned in the two decades that he's run his Water Master car washes in Standbury Park and Grantsville, UT. In person, he's engaging and personable — and quick to reward good service, or a humorous joke, or even a smile with a token of appreciation...literally. You see he never leaves his home or the car wash without a pocketful of tokens that can be



Tokens are accepted both at the in-bay automatics and in the wand bays.



Even the vacuums and vending machines accept tokens.

used in his self-serve bays, automatics, vending machines, or vacuums. Judging from the number of people who redeem the tokens, then go on to become lifelong customers, his passion is contagious.

When Dave Lawrence talks about his pair of self-service car washes, two words which come up again and again are freedom and independence. In the decade that he's been using tokens rather than cash to operate the self-serve bays and in-bay automatics, he's enjoyed operating his car washes without feeling like he has to be tethered to either site all day, every day.

"We have four automatic car washes — three soft touches and one touchless — and five self-service wand bays across two separate locations. The automatics accept credit cards, bills, tokens, and quarters, while the self-service bays accept quarters and

tokens. Tokens are used in every machine, including the vacuums and the vending machines," says Lawrence. "If customers want a wash, they use a token. If they want to vacuum, they use a token. If they want an air freshener, they drop a token into the vending machine. We can also provide discounts — so if a customer spends \$30 they get 35 \$1 tokens."

FLEET BUSINESS

Lawrence prefers the self-service approach that tokens provide to the more hands-on approach required to service volume users (such as fleet accounts) with fleet-card programs. Rather than feeling tied down by having to service fleet or VIP-type cards, Lawrence prefers to have his fleet customers serve themselves. He provides discounts for volume purchases — starting with 11 tokens for \$10, up to 35 tokens for \$30. This allows customers to purchase whatever they need whenever they want and provides the flexibility to use the extras for birthdays, anniversaries, and Christmas stocking stuffers.

"If a customer wants to buy \$100 worth of tokens they can run their card through three times, and I don't have to put money on a VIP card in the middle of the night," muses Lawrence.

Structured discounts on volume token purchases provide consistency for customers and keeps Lawrence from negotiating with every fleet account as can happen when implementing card-type programs.

"I want the freedom that used to be a driving force for entrepreneurs in the car wash business," Lawrence continues. "I just want it to flow naturally. I want customers to feel comfortable in getting the options they want with only a mild inconvenience on their part (having to run a credit card several times)."

His credit card transactions range from \$10 to several hundred dollars. What customers receive in turn are gold-dollar-sized tokens that are clearly unique.

SELF-SERVICE

PROFIT SOURCE

"I want to sell all the tokens that I can because I buy them for 30 cents and sell them for a dollar, so if they don't come back, I don't care," says Lawrence. That 70-cent profit (recall it is all profit because there are no costs for water, soap, electricity, or other inputs) can be a significant source of income. Even in his small market, Lawrence estimates that he purchases 5,000 tokens every year to 15 months. Since the durable, reusable tokens only need to be repurchased when his supply dwindles, he likely earns a profit of about \$3,500 per year from non-returned tokens alone.

In addition to the profit generated, having his tokens in circulation is good and inexpensive advertising. Each time his customers see a token in their pocket change, in the cup holder, on the bureau at home, or the desk at the office, they get a not-too-subtle reminder that the car may need a wash or vacuum. And they are reminded *where* to go.

SECURITY

Lawrence likes his big token — and wants the security of knowing that only *his* tokens will work at his sites. So he opts for gold-dollar-sized, high-security tokens. Minted with special alloys, these tokens have a unique electromagnetic signature that is recognized by his coin acceptors, which then reject any tokens with different electromechanical properties such as standard brass, red brass, or



even other security tokens from the immediate vicinity. His supplier will not sell the same alloy within a certain geographic range, so while there may be other security tokens in use nearby, they will not work at Lawrence's car washes.

"Occasionally I see other car wash tokens lying on the ground," muses Lawrence, "because people have tried them and they didn't work, so they just leave them. I'm very happy with that result."

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SELF-SERVICE

His tokens work at either of his locations. That is in sharp contrast to the paper vouchers that only work for specific machines at specific locations. "I have paper vouchers that I can give out, but customers sometimes get confused about which car wash they'll work with. VIP cards are also site-specific, but the tokens are universally accepted everywhere on either of our sites."

COMMUNITY PRESENCE

In addition to always having a pocketful of tokens to reward good service or to make someone's day, Lawrence supports community fundraisers and other civic events

Whether he is supporting the cheerleaders, the local high school, a church festival, or some other event, Lawrence provides them with tokens that they can sell at face value.

"Cheerleaders hold a mini-detail and car wash each year at the Standbury Park facility. We also support two high school football teams, two FFA chapters, two car shows, and the Bonneville Speedway," he says. "The organizations make a little money, we might get some new customers, and, best of all, we're building community."

When community golf event organizers approach Lawrence, he usually sponsors a hole — and then provides each golfer with a bright new token. "If there are 80 golfers, we'll give them



80 tokens. These are big tokens that they can use during the day as a ball marker, and maybe they'll use it for years. If so, we have a little billboard that they see every time they play."

Even a brief conversation with Lawrence is enough to recognize the passion he has for the self-service car wash business. He loves the freedom and independence that token-based car washes provide. A firm believer in the power of promotion, Lawrence spreads his tokens around town by supplying community events with tokens or gift-baskets containing tokens. And he never leaves home without a pocketful of self-promotion, so that he can reward great service. Clearly these are more than mere token benefits — and who can argue with a couple decades' worth of success? 🚗

Dottie Hopkins is a sales associate with Van Brook of Lexington. She has over 27 years of experience helping car wash customers select tokens that will perform best in their car washes. You may reach her at (859) 231-7100 or dottie@osbornecoin.com.