

How Cloister wins them over

Mike Mountz, CEO of the well-known Cloister Wash & Lube chain, explains what his company does to foster customer loyalty.

BY: KATE CARR | EDITOR IN CHIEF

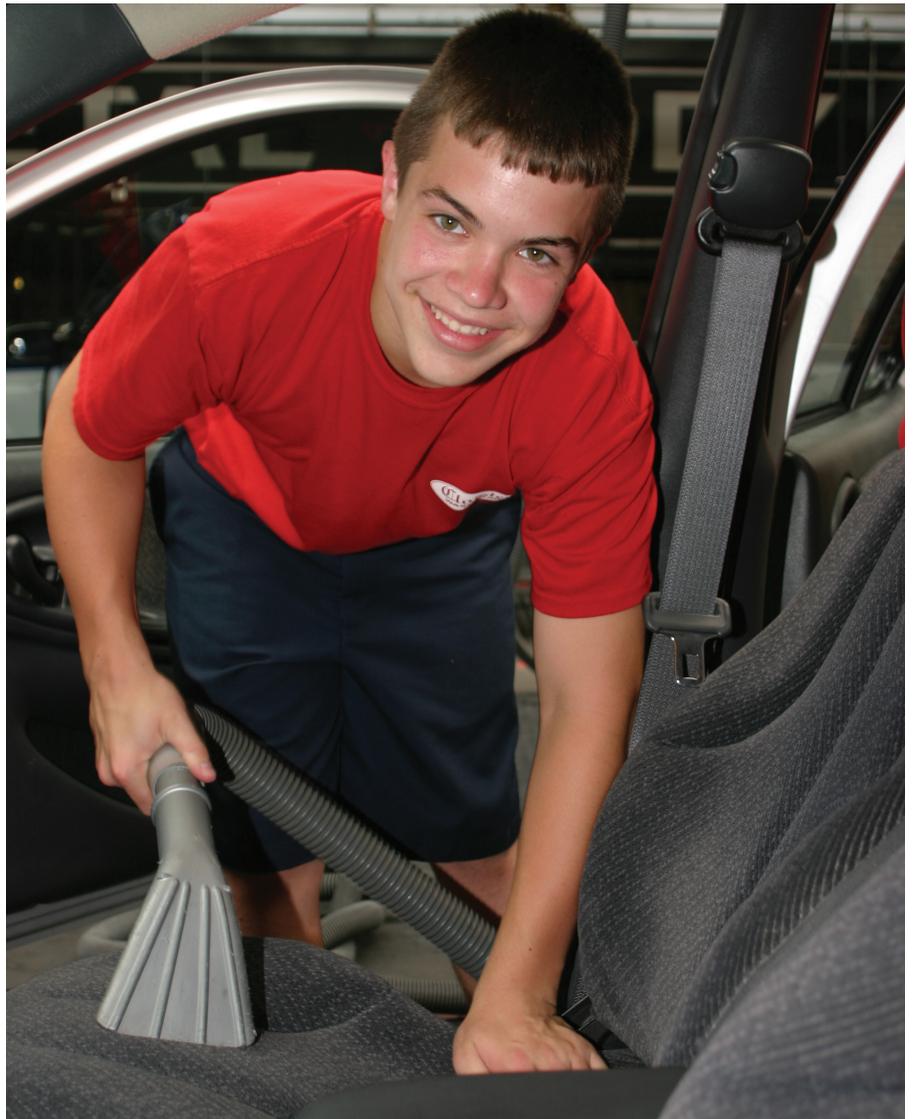
By now, you should know a thing or two about Cloister Wash & Lube. If the eastern Pennsylvania chain of carwashes wasn't on your radar before for its world-class facilities or involvement in starting the Grace for Vets program, then it should have caught your interest when its Reading, PA, location was profiled in the December 2008 segment of *Modern Marvels* on the History Channel.

Indeed, Cloister Wash & Lube is well-known throughout the carwash industry for its expansive sites and innovative equipment. The Sinking Springs location alone is set on eight acres and features a moving flat belt conveyor, self-serve bays, a dog wash, a fast oil change service and state inspection, and a pioneering self-serve motorcycle wash. The company's Lancaster, PA, site, opened in 1999, is similarly expansive, taking up four acres and featuring a wide array of services, as are the company's locations in Ephrata and York, PA.

But stop and ask a random carwash customer at Cloister and you're more likely to hear about the company's community involvement or its first-rate customer service before they start spouting off the benefits of any technological or equipment advancements. And that's just the way Mike Mountz, CEO, wants it.

It doesn't come down to price

Customer loyalty is so important to Cloister because, compared to industry averages, the wash charges a premium for its services. "I don't think you should use price to get people in," Mountz explained. "It's just going to start a trend of trying to go lower and lower. Instead of doing that, I think you should work for it."



So how does Cloister keep customers coming back — even at a \$27 price point? "I think it boils down to great service," Mountz offered. "I think the way you treat your customers is even more important than the wash quality. You could have a perfectly clean car, but if they weren't impressed with your service — the way you

treated them — they won't come back."

What makes service great? For starters, make the customer feel like a long lost friend every time they come in, Mountz suggested. Above all, concentrate on being friendly, fast and instilling trust in the customer. And don't forget the appearance of your wash and staff — Mountz said both

are paramount to your success.

Get involved with your community

Fourteen years ago Cloister started a fundraising program. "Grace Works" gave community groups the opportunity to sell carwash tickets with the organization keeping 50%. The program blossomed over the years, and Mountz said it now accounts for a good deal of their marketing.

"We do around \$1 million in business in fundraising per year," he explained. "The fundraising is very, very important. It's a great way to bring in new customers. You have great organizations that are basically out selling for you, and they bring in new business. It's been a phenomenal program."

In addition to its work with community fundraising groups (you can learn more about Cloister's program by visiting www.cloistercarwash.com/fundraising); the company also established

Grace for Vets, an industry-wide effort to honor veterans with free carwash services on Veteran's Day (www.graceforvets.org), and became involved with other goodwill efforts, like mobile blood donations and Coats for Kids (www.coats-for-kids.org).

According to Mountz, participating in these programs has encouraged recognition of the Cloister name in the community, and also been a "feel good" moment for employees. For example, the chain invites the Miller-Keystone Blood Center to set-up a blood donation on site, and the company offers free carwashes to those who give blood. "It's always extremely successful because the blood bank advertises the event in the newspaper, and it draws a large crowd," Mountz explained.

And when Coats for Kids, a foundation that raises money to give children from low-income families winter coats, conducts its annual phone fundraiser, Cloister sends 12 employees over to man the lines. "In those scenarios anyone who gives more than a \$50 donation on the phone gets a \$27 carwash for free," Mountz said.

Reach out to local businesses

Connecting to the community isn't only about charity and youth groups, Mountz said. It also involves reaching out to local



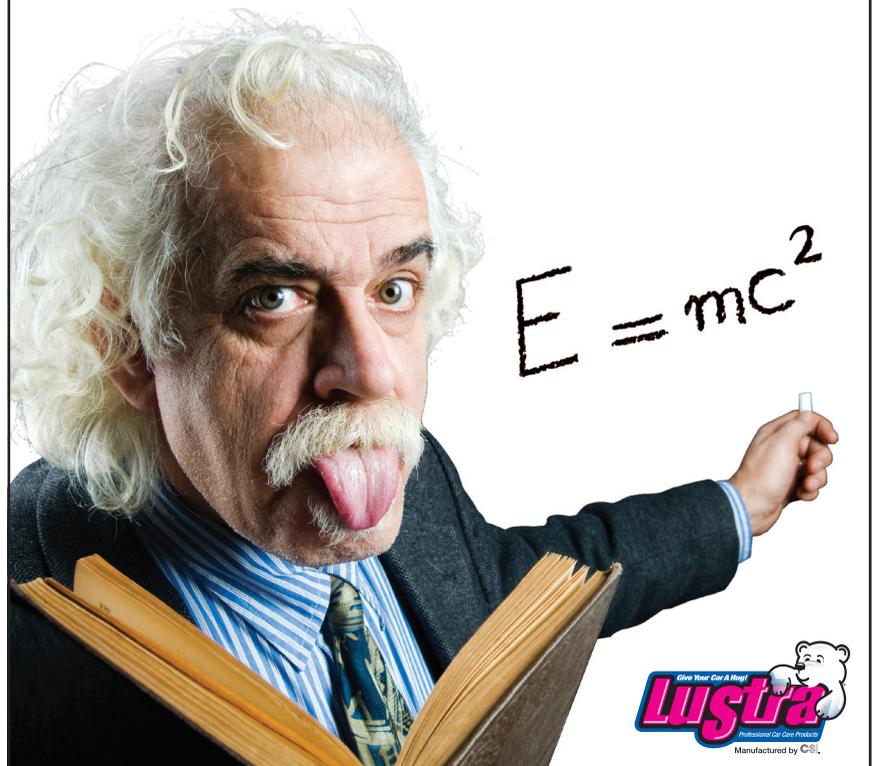
businesses and fostering relationships with those members of your market area.

For instance, Cloister started a program called "Employees Wash Free." An outside sales agent from Cloister goes to large corporations, be they hospitals or the local

Harley Davidson plant, and offers them a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have each and every employee receive a free carwash at a Cloister location.

Cloister tracks each customer by license
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Revolutionary



Circle 237

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plate with a DRB point-of-sale system. "It gives us the opportunity for 'guerilla marketing,'" Mountz explained, "where we can pinpoint what demographic we want." By partnering with a hospital, they realize they'll draw in a good deal of professionals. Or by focusing on a factory, they might focus on a blue collar demographic.

But even with this program, Mountz said the percentage of redemptions is only about 40 percent. "It's a low percentage," Mountz admitted, "but it's bringing in new customers."

Encourage repeat visits

After the initial visit, Cloister wants to make sure you'll return. With a price point

that would normally discourage weekly washes, the company works hard to give customers a reason to return.

To encourage a repeat visit, Cloister offers a "Supersaver" coupon for customers who return within 10 days. The customer uses their receipt to purchase the same wash as before, but at 50 percent off. It is not linked to the license plate, Mountz pointed out, so the customer can use it for another car or even offer it to a friend.



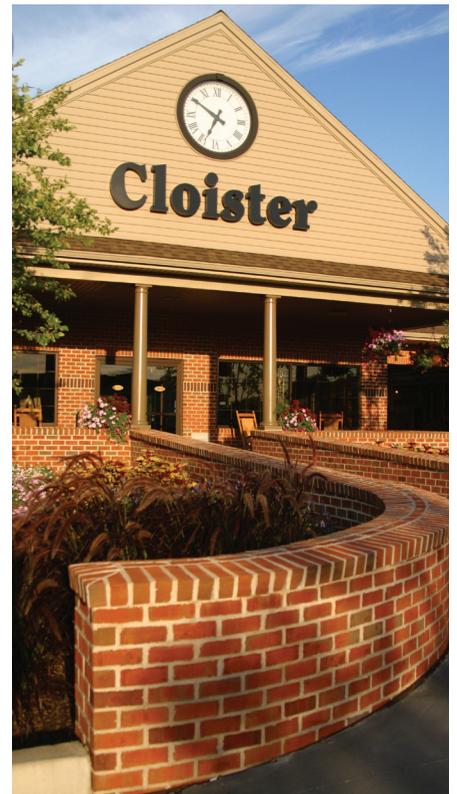
National Pride's New Eagle Line

National Pride's Eagle Line will define the future of self-service and pet wash equipment. The Eagle Line drops this year at the ICA show May 12-14th.

Visit us in booth 245 to learn more about these exciting new products!

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Circle 269



The chain also has a new loyalty program in the works. The Family Club Membership features three levels, bronze, silver and gold. A customer can sign-up for the bronze membership for free, simply by providing an e-mail and/or mailing address. By using this card, members get 20 percent off any carwash they choose during early morning hours, as well as a free birthday wash and notification of other specials. Customers can also upgrade to silver or gold cards by paying a small fee, and this gives them even more discounts throughout the year. These are family cards, too, so they're not tied to any specific license plate. **PC&D**