

TOKENS: 101

by Linda Parker, Parker Engineering

A little homework saves a lot of headaches!

Are you ready for an update or an education about tokens and their usage in the car wash industry? If so this article is for you! This is definitely one of those topics that bears repeating – and rereading from time to time. For those of you who currently have a token that is working well for your wash I'm sure this will be affirmation that the homework you did before the purchase of your token was worth the time and effort.

There are so many advantages in today's market for token usage. They build customer loyalty. In addition to the advertisement of your wash in their pockets with a custom token you also have the opportunity to give bonus tokens to your loyal customers. This has consistently shown to be a positive marketing tool. Tokens cut down on the frustration your customer experiences fumbling to insert eight to twelve quarters into your equipment every time to start the wash. Tokens valued at \$1 or more cut this process down to just a few tokens. This cuts down on the wear and tear on your mechanism as well as the need to empty the coin box as often. Tokens help to cut down on the number of trips to the bank for change. No longer will you be the change machine for businesses and students in your neighborhood.

TOKENS HELP TO CUT DOWN ON THE NUMBER OF TRIPS TO THE BANK FOR CHANGE.

The other advantages to token usage come out of the negative side of our industry. Theft and the ever present damage to equipment through vandalism is a constant in this industry. With the increases in the cost of new equipment, utilities, land cost and product, it is advantageous to look at ways to cut down on the number of quarters to insert and handle. Less money on site equals less temptation.

The first step in the token journey is to prepare. An investment of time will save lots of headaches and frustration later on. We recommend that you do your homework and answer the following checklist.

1. Identify what your goals are with token acceptance.

Consider the following questions: Do you want to eliminate quarters altogether or have quarter/token options and accessibility? Is security or theft your main issue? Are you looking for ways for your customers to cut down on the time it takes to feed in their coins? Do you want the value of your token to be a dollar or higher? Do you want to increase customer loyalty through special promotions? Are you trying to encourage commercial accounts? The possibilities are endless when customizing your token program.

2. Check out the neighborhood.

One of the common calls we receive AFTER the fact is from the owner who has just purchased the same metal alloy as the carwash down the street. The competitor's tokens are sold for .25 cents and the new owner's token is sold and valued at \$1.00. It is worse than the nightmare on Elm Street! You also want to make sure that you are not using the same metal alloy as the pizza parlor or the arcade down the street. The most common alloy that these businesses use is the 70/30 alloy (70 percent copper, 30 percent zinc). These tokens are very troublesome to the carwash owner who buys this alloy and then starts to see "the mouse" showing up in their coin vaults.

Beyond that the possibilities of metal alloys are vast. There are numerous combinations of alloys that can differentiate your token from others in your area. If you are in an area that is heavily "token occupied" one of the new "electronic tokens" or bi-metals might prove to be a wise investment. These electronic tokens are a sound option if you own a wash in an area with lots of token usage. However, if your market area is smaller and not token-congested, the electronic token is probably overkill. The nickel silver blends of tokens are also becoming popular. We recommend these tokens as a good choice with a mechanism that is modified to see the difference. Not all coin acceptors are able to accept these tokens and you should contact your manufacturer before purchase to avoid headaches down the road. Many of the token manufacturers are anxious to educate car wash owners in all of the available options open to them. Our company also provides identification of metal alloys at no cost to the operator. A well-researched token purchase guarantees a happy coin acceptor!

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We all win. Also ask yourself, what do you want your token to look like? Brass or silver, a custom imprint with your logo or a standard imprint of a car? To your customer, this is what works as a continual advertisement for your business. Color and size can also be helpful in the counting and sorting end of your business. An investment of time in the process of choosing a good token goes a long way over the years ahead.

3. Look at your changer, your vending machines and your vacuums.

The change from a single quarter coin to tokens can be very expensive. Many changers have the option of dispensing two coins. Consult with the manufacturer to determine important compatibility issues. Consider going to just tokens in your vacuums utilizing your single coin electronic acceptors. You will be encouraging the customer to use their tokens in the vacuums while still exploiting your old mechanisms to their fullest value. Use of a dual or multiple electronic coin acceptors in your equipment boxes will allow the acceptance of quarters and tokens as well as the dollar coin if desired.

Don't hesitate to contact the token manufacturers and the coin acceptor companies. They are both valuable resources in this important decision. We all want to ensure a smooth start to token acceptance in your wash and to increased revenues for your business. †

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