

A squeaky-clean business

Apps and subscription models should boost revenues in the car wash business

BY GERD SCHOLZ

FRANKFURT. The industry has dreamed of self-cleaning car paint for years and has even tried to replicate the water-repellent properties of the lotus. But even nanotechnology offers no prospect of a solution that could be industrialized. That means that cleaning and maintenance products for cars and commercial vehicles will continue to present good business opportunities.

The Car Wash, Care & Reconditioning section of Automechanika is highlighting a

because car wash facilities are often operated alongside fueling stations. Here visitors will see filling systems for alternative fuels and options for refilling the anti-nitrogen oxide additive AdBlue.

The market for car cleaning is “still on the up and up,” says Thomas Drott, managing director of the German Federal Association of Filling Stations and Vehicle Car Wash Facilities (BTG). There are no verified figures, but BTG has developed some estimates based on its experience. Drott estimates that about 14,000 portal car

BTG estimates; the number is just 6,000 to 7,000 washes in a typical portal facility.

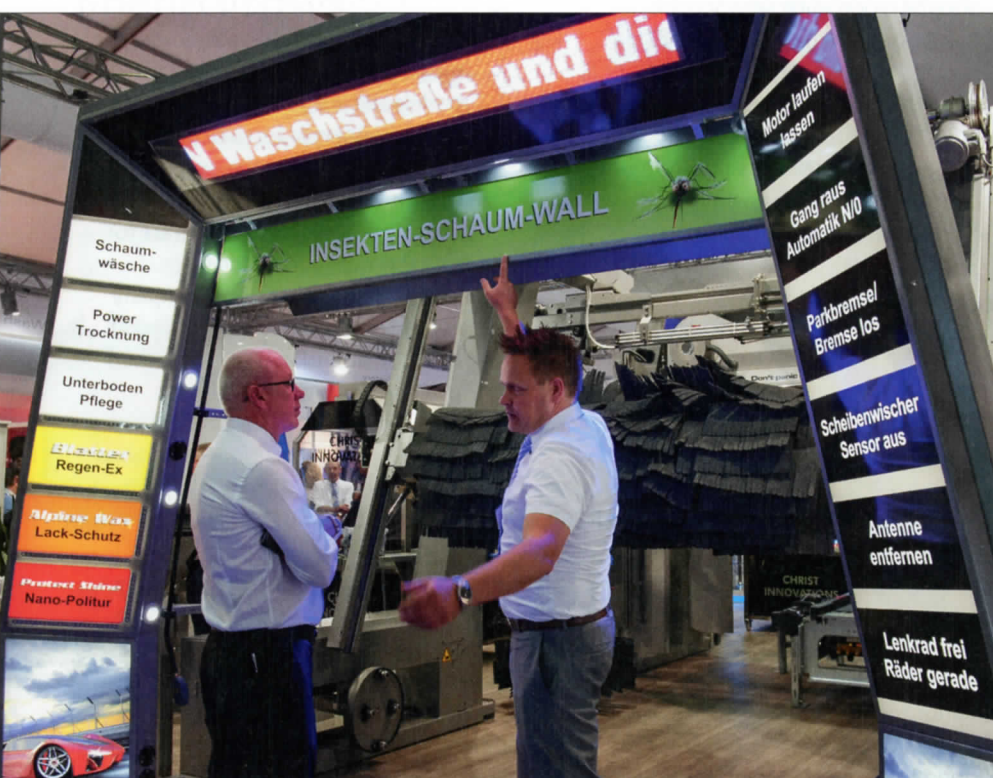
The tunnel facilities are “generally run as freestanding systems or as a car wash park,” says Drott. “There are naturally relatively large chains in this field, such as IMO, Mr. Wash, CleanCar and the like. The “normal” car wash operator is a small- to medium-sized company with one to five facilities.”

Operators are coming up with new ideas to attract customers. Drott sees a trend in the latest car wash designs. “Many car wash operators have turned to so-called indoor wash facilities where both the wash tunnel itself and the vacuum stations are located in one space,” he points out. But, he notes, the investment is significant and only pays off if the facility can count on a sufficient level of business.

Like other sectors, the car wash industry is increasingly taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digitalization. This has involved the checkout process in particular. “Companies like WashTec and Christ have systems where the customer selects, pays for and starts the wash with an app,” says Drott. “And companies like Weiss, Bunz, and Dico are offering new and extremely interesting payment options, for example, with an account card. Bunz even has a gate system.”

Besides the apps available that let the user select and pay for car washes, a number of new pricing models are being tested as well. Facility manufacturer WashTec, for example, has developed a concept to attract customers and build relationships as a way to increase revenues. Estimates suggest that only 50 to 65 percent of passenger cars are cleaned in car washes. That means there should still be quite a lot more untapped business in the market.

WashTec’s EasyCarWash concept uses a subscription model that makes it possible for customers to have their cars washed as often as they like for a fixed monthly fee. The company makes the case that operators can boost their profits by 20 percent or more with the system. The program includes an app that makes it very easy for customers and car wash operators to employ this subscription model. It will also reduce the impact of the weather on the business – a key issue, says WashTec. ■



wide range of products and services for vehicles. Naturally, it covers the key themes of the car wash business – including facilities, high-pressure cleaning systems and water treatment technology – not to mention the use of additional equipment and products for intensive exterior and interior cleaning.

Vehicle reconditioning is also covered in this section of Automechanika. It involves the repair of major and minor damage to paint, to seat cushions or to their leather covering. Automechanika has also assigned filling stations to the Car Wash, Care & Reconditioning category, not least of all

washes for passenger vehicles are in operation. They are mostly located at filling stations. In addition, there are about 2,200 carwashes that are generally operated independently of filling stations. BTG also puts the number of self-serve car washes facilities at about 2,200. They offer drivers coin-operated high-pressure washers and vacuum cleaners.

The association estimates that there are about 200 million washes in portal and tunnel washing facilities each year. Other estimates put the figure significantly higher. Each tunnel car wash handles about 50,000 vehicles per year on average, according to