

Awash

With Marketing Prowess

AUTOBELL HAS DEVELOPED AND REFINED ITS STRATEGIES THROUGH THE YEARS



Like a fine wine, many things in life seem to get better over time. Such is the case with Autobell Car Wash and its ever-evolving marketing program. A program itself that many car care operators can look at to get ideas on how to grow their marketing efforts.

Evolving Program

In the beginning in Spring 1969, Autobell Car Wash opened its first unit in Charlotte on a busy city artery that is also a state highway. Initial marketing efforts consisted of designing a logo, registering and patenting the company name and other intellectual property, putting up a sign, and providing the best car wash with the best service possible.

Shortly after the grand opening of that first unit, Autobell founder Charles Howard orchestrated the company's first real marketing program, a direct mail brochure targeting surrounding neighborhoods. The brochure explained the new equipment, chemicals and process that Autobell had introduced to the marketplace and why these were better than what other car washes were using.

The brochure also had a coupon for a free car wash and six bounce-back coupons, sometimes tied to a gasoline purchase, to encourage return business. That program worked well and was continued sporadically with varying coupons.

As it added more car washes in the 1970s, Autobell aligned itself with notable local radio and TV personalities for its broadcast advertising, usually trading car washes and gasoline for commercials and live remote broadcasts.

Autobell's foray into public relations and community involvement began, and continues today, with sponsorship of and involvement in the Carolinas Carrousel Parade, which is ranked as one of the top parade events in America.

Autobell is one of the largest and oldest sponsors of this Thanksgiving Day parade, which includes ancillary events such as a Carolinas-wide high school beauty

pageant, marching band contests and scholarship awards. These events officially kick off the holiday season. In addition, annually, Autobell enters a parade float and sponsors the appearance of Miss North Carolina.

During this decade, Autobell also began its continued sponsorship of a variety of Little League teams, as well as prominent Yellow Page advertising.

In the 1980s, Autobell's marketing efforts consisted of increased radio and TV advertising and the development of the slogan "People Can Tell When You Autobell" and its very memorable accompanying radio jingle.

The company also discovered that 10-second radio commercials on Traffic Watch targeting people in their cars coming home from work were quite effective. That program also continues today. Additionally, Autobell became the primary sponsor of NASCAR Winston Cup Series (now Nextel Cup) driver Mark Stahl in his limited race schedule. That relationship continued into the early 2000s.

Autobell founder, CEO and patriarch Charles Howard became ill in 1985 and died in 1986. During those years, and for a period thereafter, Autobell held status quo on its marketing and expansion while Charles' son and new CEO Chuck Howard concentrated on stabilizing the company and preparing Autobell for a future under a new guiding force. By the end of the decade, Autobell had 10 units and had washed over eight million cars since its inception.

The 1990s was a springboard for Autobell's marketing efforts, with the company expanding into sponsorship

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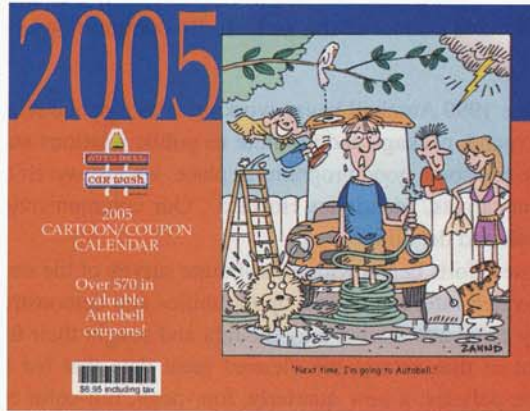
—Chuck Howard, CEO, Autobell Car Washes

relationships with the NFL's Carolina Panthers, The Charlotte Knights AA baseball team, and continuation of its NASCAR driver sponsorship. The company also was quick to develop a Web site (www.autobell.com) and began its Charity Car Wash and Employee Scholarship programs.

By the end of the 1990s, Autobell had 21 car washes, had washed more than 16 million cars, and marketing efforts were shifting into high gear.



Chuck Howard, CEO of Autobell Car Washes, has been awarded numerous awards for the company's marketing campaigns.



If the decade of the 1990s was a marketing springboard, the 2000s have been a catapult.

"Our marketing efforts are vital to the operation and success of Autobell Car Wash," says Chuck Howard. "We have several very important marketing targets with whom we must communicate on a regular basis, and it's imperative that our messages are sent continually, concisely and clearly in a positive manner.

"Our marketing targets are: 1) current and future customers, basically the general public; 2) current and potential employees of Autobell Car Wash; 3) the car wash industry, which needs all the good marketing examples and positive publicity it can get; 4) town government and zoning officials where we have and/or want to develop car washes; and 5) the media, which is a vehicle to communicate with these targets.

"We have lots of stories and messages pursuant to our business and success that we want these audiences to know about," he adds. "There are other car wash options for customers to choose, and we want to give them good reasons to gravitate to and develop loyalty toward Autobell."



Autobell's sincere commitment to conservation and environmental practices have endeared the wash to its communities.

In late 1999 Autobell began working with a public relations agency to help refine, expand, package and promote its public relations and marketing efforts.

"We had some good programs in place; we just weren't getting the message out to our targets," continues Howard. "Our communications efforts needed a good wash and detailing."

Those efforts began with an elaborate survey of the employees that yielded much coveted information and opportunities and demonstrated to them that the company cared about what they thought and sought their feedback.

"Out of that survey, we gleaned great data that led to new or improved employee policies; a new quarterly, four-page, full-color employee newsletter; and specific employee demographic information and input that helped us better understand who our employees are, what their interests are and how they viewed Autobell's product, service, management and customers," notes Howard.

The company also conducted customer surveys and focus groups to gather even more information.

Since 2000, Autobell has had an aggressive public relations program that not only publicizes its community involvement, but constantly tries to improve on programs and even develops new ones.

"One great example is the custom cartoons that we commission for the employee newsletter," elaborates Howard. "We had all these custom cartoons that had been in the newsletters, and we wanted to put them to further use and enjoyment. So, in 2004 we began producing an Autobell Cartoon/Coupon Calendar that is sold to customers for \$6.95. It has more than \$70 worth of coupons, two per month; interesting car care and Autobell facts; and custom, positive, car wash industry-related cartoons to give people a chuckle and a smile when they think of Autobell. We have begun displaying enlarged framed cartoons in car wash lobbies to elicit the same effect. The calendar program is very successful and grows each year.

"We have lots of good programs and activities at Autobell that we want the public to know about," continues Howard. "When people learn about

our charity car wash program that has raised more than \$1.6 million since 1998; our employee scholarship program that has awarded over \$53,000 since 2000; our sincere commitment to conservation and environmental practices that have garnered us six awards since 2000; or our involvement and support in various community events and fundraisers, we want them to know that Autobell is doing all these things because we want to and believe we should.

"We want to support the communities we are in and want the communities to support us in return. We strive to set an example of being good citizens, a good business, good employer, good stewards of our environment and good neighbors. We want people to know that we are committed to and serious about all of these efforts and that we offer a great car wash. We actually have done many of these things for years; now we're telling the world about it. That's marketing."

In late 2003, Autobell ventured outside North Carolina for the first time by opening four car washes within three months in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Since the new Virginia units were geographically isolated from other Autobell markets, the company decided to test market a frequent washer program called ABC (Autobell's Best Customers).

In less than two years, the program has signed up more than 6,000 customers. These customers receive various incentives including discounts, rewards, free washes and communications from Autobell including the employee newsletter that keeps them abreast of company activities and possible employment opportunities for friends and family.

A recently unveiled, systemwide marketing program geared to frequent customers is the Autobell Club Monthly Membership, in which customers may purchase unlimited full-service car washes for \$39.95 per month. The club also offers a SuperCard that includes a full-service wash and several extra services for \$64.95 per month.

Last year Autobell developed a comprehensive information packet that doubles as

a media kit and a corporate presentation piece that is used to educate town government and zoning officials about the company when it wants to build new car washes.

Additionally, municipal officials and media in towns where Autobells are located receive the employee newsletter and the cartoon/coupon calendar. Howard and his son Carl, COO of Autobell, have also attended numerous government meetings to further educate local officials about the water management practices of professional car washes.

"If I were going to advise a car wash operator on marketing, and I'm happy to do so," states Howard, "I'd suggest allocating between 3 percent and 5 percent of gross revenues to marketing, which includes advertising, public relations, special events and the cost of free car washes. I would further suggest that they become great water managers by treating and recycling wash water, become involved as much as possible in community events and activities, and develop a charity car wash program.

"Of course, it's crucial to hire and properly train, treat, and outfit the best employees possible," adds Howard. "Become adept and knowledgeable

about media relations and exercise that knowledge. Always look for opportunities to get your name, face, logo, wash passes, business cards, business philosophies, community involvement and positive attitude in front of as many people as possible. Along with all these components, you must remember to keep your house in order. Keep your property presentable, your equipment efficient and effective, and your employees, 'who are the best or worst marketing tools you have,' well-trained and looking good. These are all marketing components.

"Many car care operators don't realize that everything they do or don't do on a daily basis affects marketing in some way. We consider the marketing aspects and ramifications of every decision we make."

Autobell Car Wash is now America's third largest full-service car wash chain with 43 units in 22 North Carolina and four Virginia cities washing two million cars a year. The company has never closed or sold any of its washes and is continually building and/or looking for new unit sites.

The Autobell marketing committee meets monthly and includes the CEO, COO, marketing manager, director of public relations, IT director, human resource director, office manager, two business/data analysts, two representatives from the company's public relations firm, and sometimes other pertinent internal and external participants. At monthly District Manager and General Manager meetings, a marketing update and/or component is always on the agenda, and a managers' marketing roundtable has recently been added as a post-manager meeting option.

Autobell is revered as a marketing stalwart and pioneer in the car wash industry and is eager for other operators to follow its footsteps.

"We are delighted to share our ideas and experience within the industry to hopefully help promote professional car washes and advance the overall reputation of the entire industry," Howard concludes, "so we are also marketing to our own industry to try to improve it. Do the right things, and then tell people about it, that's marketing." ACCB

SUMMER 2005
 THE AUTOBELL CAR WASH INC. EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER

The AUTO-GRAPH

#22 SHELBY AUTOBELL TAKES TOP HONORS AT THE INAUGURAL AUTOBELL OLYMPICS



Customers visiting the #4 Independence Boulevard Autobell in Charlotte, NC, on Wednesday, June 8, may have thought, "Gee, they're a tad overstaffed today." The customers got a wash with their wash,

as more than 100 of Autobell's top employees representing each of its 43 car washes in 22 North Carolina and 4 Virginia cities converged on the corner car wash to compete in the inaugural Autobell Olympics. Competition components included timing and procedures in vacuuming, detailing, and overall excellence. Each store manager chose up to two of his or her best employees to come to Charlotte for the day to participate.

"This friendly competition was a team-building exercise that also recognized the top performers in our company," explained Carl Howard, Vice President and COO of Autobell, who envisioned and spearheaded the event. "It went very smoothly, everybody had a great time, and it never disrupted the regular business of that unit."

"We instill strict car washing procedures that are time-tested for over 36 years for effectiveness and efficiency,"

continued Howard
 "These participants are the best of the best system-wide, and we witnessed some amazing performances. Congratulations to the store and individual winners, and thanks to all the fabulous participants for their hard work and enthusiasm."

STORE WINNERS:
Vacuuming:
 Gold—#22 Shelby, NC
 Silver—#4 Independence Blvd., Charlotte, NC
 Bronze—#44 Denver, NC
Detailing:
 Gold—#7 Lincolnton, NC
 Silver—#29 Piper Station, Charlotte, NC
 Bronze—#19 Mooresville, NC
Overall:
 Gold—#22 Shelby, NC
 Silver—#18 Union Road, Gastonia, NC
 Bronze—#38 New Garden, Greensboro, NC

INDIVIDUAL WINNERS:
Vacuuming
 Gold—Steven Kaiser, manager, #44 Denver
 Silver—Jorge Castillo, #4 Independence Blvd, Charlotte
 Bronze—Bryan Thompson, manager, #22 Shelby (now manager of #25 Hanlins Road)
Detailing
 Gold—John Capps, representing #29 Piper Station (now manager at #22 Shelby)
 Silver—Jeff Sawyer, manager, #26 Garner, NC
 Bronze—Rex Baucum, manager, #41 Huntersville, NC



Autobell President & CEO Chuck Howard (right) congratulates #22 Shelby, NC, crew member Kyle Carter, who accepted the inaugural Autobell Olympics gold medal for overall excellence on behalf of his unit.



Winning store managers and team members display their medals.