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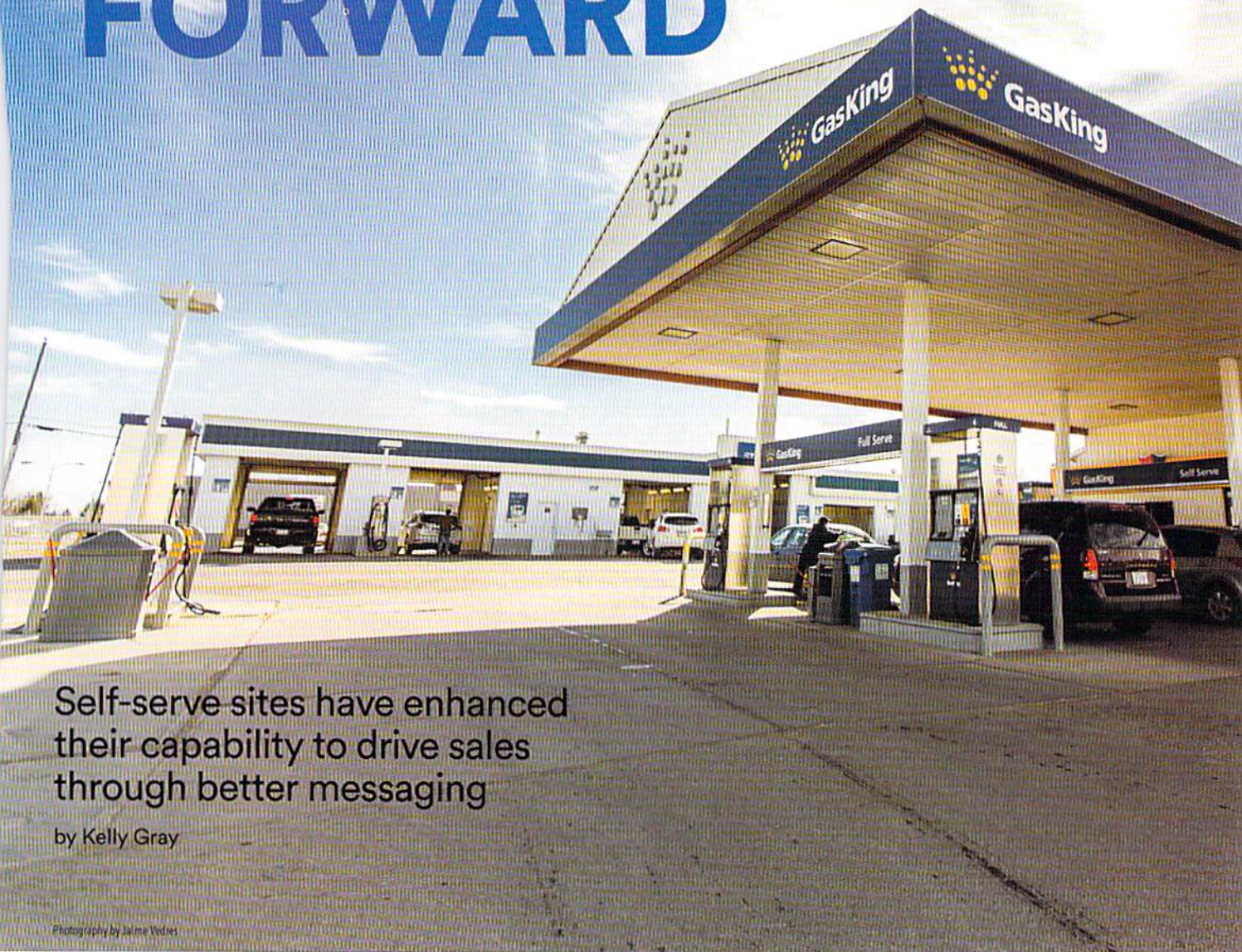
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# FORECOURT FORWARD



## Self-serve sites have enhanced their capability to drive sales through better messaging

by Kelly Gray

Photography by Jaime Vedres

It was not that long ago that the majority of gas station customers expected personal service when they pulled up to the pump. Today, about 85% of Canada's fuel sites are self-service. And, while there are still some holdouts with centres like Richmond and Coquitlam in BC mandating full service, customers seeking to lower the price of a tank of gas and major oil co's looking to expand their marketshare have continued working to make the gap between self and full service even larger.

Most of us now take self-service for granted. Motorists quickly pull off the road, park at a dispenser, get out and fuel up. In less than five minutes tanks are filled and cars are back on the street. Customers want the experience to be fast and efficient, but they have expectations that come from

the days when forecourt self-service was standard operating practice.

Today's forecourt has evolved into a location that does just this. Dispensers offers fuel, but also merchandise a host of other products and services from cold beverages, to take away meal items, to

automotive needs. The self-service customer in 2017 has far greater choice than the customer from 1997 and retailers that evolved along the way have been able to maximize the sales opportunity. The best of today's self-service forecourts work hard to mirror some of the benefits of



## CANADA'S FIRST SELF-SERVICE GAS STATION WAS IN WINNIPEG IN 1947 AT KEN HENDERSON'S THRIFTWAY SELF-SERVICE.

traditional full service. For example, a full serve pump attendant might ask a customer if they know about the in store specials. Do you need wiper blades? Do you need a car wash? At self-service sites, pump dispenser units now communicate these messages and more to customers.

"It's all about convenience," says Bruce Kidd of Hart Highway Husky, Prince George, BC. "People are time pressured and they want solutions. The forecourt is a good place to start given that almost all of us find ourselves cuing at the pump at

least a couple of times a month. I like pay at pump. Some suggest that it keeps people out of the c-store where they can add to their gas purchase. I have found that it's better to have dedicated c-store customers without the hassle of gas purchase lines at the till. The number of secondary sales do not warrant the hassle and in-store confusion with the added gas customers. If they need something they can come in," he says, noting that it's highly important to reach gas customers with in-store messaging while they stand at the forecourt fueling at the dispenser.

### Technology to the rescue

A good example of leading edge dispenser technology that helps bring those customers in-store as well as offer Pay and Go is Wayne Fueling Systems' Ovation 2 series. Using a large dispenser mounted video screen with customer interface, Ovation 2 drives targeted product messaging with dedicated media that translates into c-store sales. The company reports that an enhanced media-at-pump experience creates a 16% lift in traffic from forecourt to c-store and a 3% to 5% hike

in sales. Devices are flexible in capability with media messaging changing through day parts. This means, morning customers are offered coffee and breakfast sandwiches while afternoon customers might like the two for one energy drink promo. Specials for car wash, wiper blades and wiper fluid are constant through the day. Ovation also has 25% more space for branding and other messages dedicated to driving secondary sales.

Not to be outdone, Gilbarco, has launched its FlexPay IV platform in Canada. This system enables operators to communicate in-store products and other information via audio and video on dispenser screens. As well, retailers can create product coupons that can be used at the point of sale inside the store and allows them to update their site's content from the system's portal which can be set to automatically push content updates to the dispensers on set intervals every day.

Working to increase customer throughput and overall service satisfaction levels with its own pay and go system, Esso launched an expanded version of its Speedpass program this past March.

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### Mobile messaging and contactless payment create new opportunities

Coming will be digital messaging through social media where electronic ID like credit cards and drivers' licence or cellphone will activate an RFID beacon as you near a commercial site. As you approach a business like a self service gas bar, the dashboard display in your car will let you know that Joe's Gas and Service is having a sale on beverages and its submarine sandwiches are 50% off. Already most smartphones and devices utilize location based service provisions where a phone's GPS allows the device to let you know the type of businesses near at hand. This 'beacon' technology will become more directed to individual users as we move forward.



Photography by Brandon Gray



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According to Michael Cohen, president of the Canadian Marketing Association, 56% of respondents to a survey on beacon systems said they had already used the technology.

45% of mobile users that have used a device said it has led them to make an immediate purchase. "Beacons and location-based services offer an opportunity for businesses looking to take their mobile messaging strategy to the next level. From a marketing perspective, it's about talking to your customers at the right time, place, and medium," he says.

With this convenience in mind operator Shell has teamed with car manufacturer Jaguar Land Rover to offer its customers a solution to time starvation. New Jags are fitted with a pay app that permit drivers to fuel and go with the car behaving much like an Apple Wallet. Known as 'cashless motoring' the objective is for the car to handle all transactions such as drive-thru, tolls, and gas and c-store purchases from the interactive onboard display. Beacon technology will be able to communicate with the car and deliver messages directly to the in-dash video screen.

When it comes to new age air and vacuum service, AIR-serv has announced a new contactless-only payment solution at more than 7,000 tire inflation and car vacuum machines located at gas stations in Canada. Working alongside technology provider Monex Group, the new systems eliminates the need for coin to fill tires or vac out car interiors.

According to Frank Merrill, executive vice-president at AIR-serv Canada, AIR-serv's new system is PCI certified for tap-only transactions with support for Visa payWave, MasterCard Tap and Go, Interac Flash, and Apple Pay. There is no need for coin, chip and pin, swipe, or insertion. Payments are instantaneous and effortless via contactless-enabled credit or debit cards, or a mobile device. "This is a feature that we knew we had to have as fewer Canadians are carrying coin," he says.

At self-service wash sites, technology is also delivering a stronger service focus with RFID patches and contactless payment options. Here Exact One Ltd. offers a range of solutions that allow customers easy access to wash sites 24 hours a day without the need for coin or interaction with staff. Monex has also rolled out its Tap & Wash contactless payment solution. The company reports it partnered with Mondo Products Company Ltd. and launched the product at the Oshawa Parkway Coin Wash in 2016.

Over the last 70 years that Canadian motorists have enjoyed self-service options the basic needs have not changed. Gas tanks still need to be filled, tires need air, and cars need to be cleaned. What has changed is the ease of product and service delivery through technology and the demands of time harried customers. With business more competitive and the driving public more value conscious, operators have to ask themselves if they are prepared to embrace the changes in self-serve and move their business forward. **OCTANE**

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# The merchandising opportunity

Draw in customers, drive traffic and provide a convenient experience with the right assortment of merchandise at your car wash on projects



Nikki Lockington,  
Digital Editor  
CSN-Canada

We've all been in line at the grocery store or big box store and picked up a few impulse items along the path to purchase. Whether it was a pack of gum, a magazine, or a pack of batteries, these specific items were strategically placed there to encourage you to grab a few more things you didn't know you needed on the way out the door. Think of your car wash lobby or cash desk area in the same way: you can encourage your customers to add to their purchase by carrying the right assortment of products.

Mike Black, co-owner of Ontario's Valet Car Wash chain, which has 10 locations, believes it's a smart business move to stock an assortment of products, such as air fresheners, cellphone accessories and snacks.

"I think offering these additional items is essential. It typically adds about 50 cents per car, so it's really worth it," he says, adding that it's important to figure out what your customers are looking for, and be sure you're stocking it.

## Finding the products

Determining your exact product range can be a challenge, but it comes down to knowing your customers and keeping an eye on the trends.

Black starts with air fresheners as an obvious choice for car wash operators. He's sure to carry the biggest and best assortment of fresheners he can.

"Just the other day, a lady came up to the cash register and said, 'I drive all the way here because you're the only place that has powdered scented air fresheners,'" he says. "We find that because our selection is so vast, we actually have restaurant owners and other business owners come in to buy 20 or 30 air fresheners at a time for their washrooms. The bigger the selection, the better."

Kirby Kazeil, owner of Suds Car Wash in Regina, SK, agrees, saying that if you decide to carry a line of something, such as air fresheners, it's essential to commit. "My advice is carry a full line; we carry every kind of air freshener

you can think of. People drive from all over just to purchase because they love our selection. It drives traffic, and these people will become wash customers sooner or later," he says. Kazeil also stocks wiper blades, cellphone accessories, licence plates, emergency kits, flashlights, washer fluid, and hitch covers.

Windshield washer fluid is another really big seller for Black, and to top it off, it's an opportunity to provide top-notch customer service. "It's a seasonal product, but the advantage we have at the car wash is that we'll actually put the fluid into the reservoir for people, and everyone always really appreciates that extra bit of service."

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**"I think offering these additional items is essential. It typically adds about 50 cents per car, so it's really worth it."**

**- Mike Black, Valet Car Wash**

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At Black's sites, cellphone accessories, such as charging cords and adaptors, have really taken off. "One thing that's really big right now is cellphone holders for people's cars. These holders attach to the dash and the phone sits in it. I think the reason is that people use their cellphones a lot for GPS and this keeps it hands free. We sell these for \$13.99."