



Issue 44

**CLEAN** *magazine*™

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# SOFT WASHING

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by Allison Hester

Troy Whitaker is the owner of Wash Kleen, a small exterior cleaning company in the small community of Somerset, Kentucky. He has three trucks, two employees, and one renewed vision for his company – and it’s paying off big time. For the first time in his 16+ years of washing, Troy’s business is “exploding” – having already more than doubled last year’s gross income, and recently completing his biggest project to date.

**Small town life** certainly has its charms, and Somerset, Kentucky is no exception. Built along one of the nation’s largest man-made lakes, the small town of 11,196 draws a lot of tourists, particularly in the summer. “Somerset is a great place to live and raise a family,” Troy explained. But even with all the lake houses that need washing, small town life is not without its challenges, especially for a service company.

Somerset is the county seat  
“Wash Kleen”



**Troy Whitaker and his family.**

for Pulaski County, which has a population of around 63,000 spread across 658 square land miles. “I often have to drive a *long* way to reach my customers.”

**Troy first became** interested in pressure washing back around 1999 when he was the assistant manager for the local Wal-Mart. “A guy came and cleaned our sidewalks, then 45 minutes later handed me a bill for \$200. I realized I was in the wrong

business.”

Not too long after that incident, Troy was at the local racetrack when he noticed a guy pressure washing the cars. “I went and talked to him and was shocked when I learned he wasn’t just being paid to wash the cars, he was getting paid to wash the entire facility.”

It was then that Troy realized that yes, even in the small town of Somerset, there were plenty of opportunities to build a pressure washing business. “So I maxed out my credit card, bought a \$5,000 used pressure washer, and started knocking on doors.”

Troy ran his company – which he originally named Whitaker’s Power Washing – on a part-time basis until just a little over two years ago. “When my wife got a job as a schoolteacher, we could use her job’s insurance for our family,” he explained. “That freed

me up from needing to keep a second job, and it felt like it was time to take the leap.” He then changed the company name to Wash Kleen, wanting a “bigger” name that would also make it easier to sell eventually.

*Since going full time*, Troy has learned a lot on how to better run his business, making several adjustments along the way. These key factors have allowed him to grow exponentially over the past few months:

**1. Having a mentor.** Michael Kriesle of First Choice Power Washing, LLC, is well-known in the pressure washing industry, and lives just about 1.5 hours from Somerset. “Michael has always been very good about helping me out when I had questions or problems,” Troy explained. “He’s also the one who really walked me through how to effectively bid jobs, and he’s

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guided me in how to be a professional in this industry.”

## **2. Joining trade associations.**

Troy is happy to be a member of both the PWRA and the UAMCC. “The ideas I get from both of these groups are very helpful,” he explained. “Both organizations have provided me with a wealth of knowledge and invaluable resources.”

**3. Marketing and networking locally.** Troy said he has gotten a lot more involved with his local community through his area’s Chamber of Commerce and Facebook groups, which has helped Wash Kleen get its name out in his market. He also has had success with Facebook advertising and marketing. “I’m acquainted with the guys from the *Gas Monkey Garage* TV series, so they’ll send me autographed items that I give away on Facebook. That’s worked well in getting people to follow my Facebook page.”

Additionally, with only one strip running through his small town, “it’s been very beneficial to have all three trucks lettered up so people recognize us.”

**4. Playing on his team’s strengths.** One area where Wash Kleen has a key advantage is in roof cleaning. That’s because his part-time technician is also a certified roof inspector in three states and a certified insurance adjuster in two states. “Unlike most roof cleaning companies, we can do a lot more than just clean the roof. We can give the customer a detailed description of what’s going on with the roof, including its life expectancy after cleaning. Or, if we see an issue where the customer really won’t benefit from cleaning, we will let them know and turn the job down.”

**5. Being more selective about jobs.** Troy said he is focusing on getting larger projects – like the 8,000 square-foot lake house his team recently cleaned in two hours. “I’m starting to send smaller jobs to a competitor



**Gas station canopies are a regular cleaning project for Wash Kleen.**

rather than taking on everything that comes my way.”

In some instances, “larger projects” refer to multi-site contracts, such as chain restaurants or gas stations. “We cleaned about 30 gas station just this past month (September),” he explained. In recent months, Wash Kleen has gained several contracts with gas station chains to clean their concrete, buildings, and canopies. “We are willing to travel quite a way for those jobs, and that has helped us get contracts for multiple sites.” In fact, one of Troy’s goals for next year is to have two full-time employees working exclusively on commercial contracts.

He is also targeting more large structure cleaning projects, such as the recent cabinet factory his team recently cleaned, which was his biggest and most challenging project to date.

## **The Cabinet Factory**

In September, Wash Kleen was initially hired to wash only the front of one building at a cabinet factory, which, among other things, had ugly red clay along the bottom portion of the building. “We applied F9 on the clay and it worked absolutely amazing. The customer was so impressed with the results that they ended up hiring us to clean the entire facility.”

The “entire facility” consisted of six separate buildings equating to over



3,000 linear feet of 40-foot wall. The Wash Kleen team downstreamed their chemicals onto the building from the ground using a J-Rod with a large zero-degree tip. “That, followed by a high-volume rinse literally made the red clay go away.” They also cleaned about 1,000 feet of sidewalk around the buildings.

However, the most unusual portion of the job required washing an 85-foot concrete silo. For this portion of the job, his team rented an 80-foot articulated boom then soft washed using roof mix and a Yamada pump. “I knew that it would be difficult to downstream the silo evenly from the lift, so I decided to soft wash with my roof pump instead. That way we could start with the chemical at the top and just let it run down.” To clean, they used their roof mix to kill the algae, then went back over with a carwash chemical called Bay Bright to brighten the concrete.

The three-man team finished the entire job in just 1.5 days – largely due to Whitaker’s meticulous planning. “When estimating, I really worked out each section of the project, thinking through what types of equipment and chemicals we would need.”

However, the biggest challenge

– besides the wind and an on and off rain – was trying to figure out how to keep their water tanks full. “I didn’t want to have to pay one of my guys to just go back and forth filling up our tanks,” he explained. So he got creative. “I told the Suzie volunteer fire department I would donate \$500 if they would hang around and make sure our tanks stayed full. It worked out great and saved us a ton of time.”

### *Paying It Forward*

For Troy, one of the most exciting aspects of having such a successful year is that he is now in a position to start helping others. “I never thought I’d be a mentor. Recently, though, there was a fellow cleaner I know in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, who had his equipment stolen right when he had a large project to complete. I came down and helped him clean 10 apartment buildings, which we finished all in one day.”

In addition to helping others, Troy said it has been very rewarding watching his company grow over the past year. “I’ve always been in management and sales, and have helped other people their businesses. It’s great to finally build a business I can say is all mine.”<sup>©</sup>