



Cleaning up on a good idea

Jason Clout reports on a thriving car-wash franchise that doesn't use water.

Environmental car-wash co-founder Jim Cornish says he has learned that finding new franchisees can be more than educated guesswork.

Cornish and Stewart Nicholls launched Ecowash Mobile in March 2004.

The system, which does not use water in the car-cleaning process, was designed from the start to be a franchise.

"That's allowed us to grow," he says.

"Rather than taking an existing business and adapting it to franchising, we built it along a franchising model from the very start."

Applying franchising principles to its processes has already helped Ecowash establish joint venture arrangements in other countries, including in the Middle East.

But one process Ecowash had to develop was an understanding of what makes a good franchisee.

"We are much more formalised now about what it takes to be good at running the franchise," Cornish says.

"We've also put a lot of work in being able to assess how a franchise is running, pointing out areas where their business needs strengthening."

Cornish and Nicholls both had motor vehicle backgrounds, including racing and rally cars.

Cornish also worked as marketing executive with Nestlé Purina, while Nicholls was a motor mechanic who ran his own business.

But a car industry background was not mandatory for Ecowash Mobile franchisees, since only one had worked in the motor vehicle industry.

Nor have they been people with experience in other franchise systems.

For \$50,000 plus GST, franchisees receive what Cornish describes as a turn-key operation, in that they should be able to come in and start operating immediately after



Ecowash's Stewart Nicholls, left, and Jim Cornish

Photo: TAMARA VONINSKI

their two-week induction.

"We've deliberately set it up that way," Cornish says. "They get an exclusive territory, the company vehicle, even pens — it's a full start-up pack."

"Our idea is that franchisees would come to us if they knew everything was supplied."

Revenues from territories largely depend on the ability and application of the individual franchisee more than the location, says Cornish.

"There are franchisees in prime areas which might be doing OK, but in other areas which might be thought of as

battling, the franchise can be booming."

As a guide, franchisees can generate \$1200 to \$2500 a week in total before expenses.

"It depends a lot on the goal of the franchisee. There is the possibility for franchisees to have multi-vehicle territories."

Franchisees pay a fixed rate back to Ecowash. Cornish declines to specify the amount.

"But it is a fixed fee rather than a percentage."

"We didn't want a percentage because that can mean a really successful franchisee can end up paying more in fees,"

he says, referring to the amount paid in absolute terms for bigger operations when a percentage of revenue is taken.

There are 35 franchisees now, and a total of 45 of the franchise's bright orange Hyundai Getz are on the road.

They operate in all states of Australia except for Tasmania and use a master franchise system.

"We're definitely still looking for franchisees," says Cornish.

The company's non-water system has also been picked up in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and France, where Ecowash has joint ventures.

"Because it's a waterless system, it can be done anywhere."

Traditional car-washing at home with a hose — if it's even permitted due to water restrictions — uses 180 litres of water per wash, says Ecowash, a claim that is based on Sydney Water statistics. But avoiding water was not only for environmental reasons, says Cornish.

Water is actually a poor lubricant, he explains.

Regular car-cleaning often leaves "feather scratches" on the paintwork, he says.

The special Ecowash biodegradable product range claims to remove dirt without scratching the car.

The polymer compound is said to leave a coating that should assist in a better finish after further washes.

Prices for clients vary depending on the job. But Cornish says they range from about \$35 at home to \$120 for a full-detail job that would be suitable for a car dealer's showroom.

As the service is mobile, Ecowash gets presented with cars in unusual places such as a ski resort at Thredbo or Melbourne's Crown casino.

"Because it's a waterless system, it can be done anywhere — such as a showroom, car park or on the street," Cornish says.