

On the Road



De Pere

Destination: Cleaning Systems, Inc., De Pere, Wis.

Modern Car Care caught up with Cleaning Systems Inc. at the company's headquarters in De Pere, Wis.



Cleaning Systems, Inc. (CSI), a manufacturer of detergents and other chemicals for the carwash industry, was founded in 1976 by Dave Krause. CSI's modern, 67,000-square-foot facility was designed for a continuous flow to ensure maximum efficiency and ease of expansion. State-of-the-art metering equipment and control instrumentation assure batch-to-batch quality and consistency. CSI has approximately 17 total acres available for expansion in the future.

CSI's Lustra brand of professional car-care products are marketed through a worldwide

distribution network, allowing the company to provide exceptional technical knowledge and service support at the local level. The Lustra value-added package includes quality products, exceptional service, innovative solutions and creative marketing support for its customers.

CSI was started as a pressure-washer company focused on cleaning trucks. In 1980, the focus shifted to manufacturing and developing its own detergents. Four years later, CSI began marketing nationally to the carwash market by developing "The One Step," the industry's first effective touchless presoak.

The company began to grow and in 1987, and CSI moved from its 4,000-square-foot location to a 12,000-square-foot facility. In 1991, CSI introduced the first reclaim-compatible touchless presoak called Advantage.

The company moved to its current manufacturing facility in 1997. Two years later, it sold the pressure-washer division to focus on providing specialized cleaning and protection products. In 2001, CSI celebrated its 25th anniversary and became an ISO 9001 registered company. That same year, CSI introduced the industry's first non-corrosive low-pH presoak called The Answer, which was officially patented in 2004.

The company achieved another milestone in 2002 when it began offering a complete line of cleaning and protection products that were totally free of hydrofluoric acid (HF) and ammonium bifluoride (ABF).

CSI introduced its Lustra brand in 2003 to have more consumer appeal and help operators better promote their washes.



Signature products:

- TheAnswer - Non-corrosive low-pH product
- Performix - Reclaim compatible touchless presoak.
- SuperSlick - Super lubricity foaming detergent for soft cloth tunnels.
- LiftOff - Non-acid, non-caustic wheel cleaner
- Dry-Max - Highly concentrated drying agent for high- or low-pressure applications.
- BugGoo - Specially formulated liquid bug remover that easily removes bugs and bird droppings but is gentle to vehicle finishes.
- Glo-N-Go - At the 2005 Car Care World Expo, CSI introduced its line of detail products and a detail program to better serve the full serve tunnel market.

Q & A

MCC: Please explain CSI's research and development process.

CSI: We take several different approaches to product development at CSI. We first of all respond to product needs or changes as determined through a quarterly Distributor Satisfaction Survey as well as meetings with our Distributor Advisory Council and a separate Product Advisory Council. Additionally we have our F.A.S.T. form (Feedback Action Suggestion Template) on our Web site so our distributors and operator customers can give us suggestions or identify product changes needed for their businesses.

Our two senior chemists have more than 40 years of combined product development experience in formulating cleaning products. Once a product development idea is identified and agreed upon, the project is prioritized and assigned to our research and development staff. Lab work and testing and the latest design of experiments software is used to formulate solutions for development projects. Extensive lab and field testing is then done to authenticate the effectiveness of the products developed and meet stringent ISO 9001 testing protocols.

Additionally we are continually working

on next-generation products. In this area we are thinking outside the box and trying to anticipate the industry's needs several years down the road.

MCC: Tell me about CSI's quality controls.

CSI: The process used to manufacture our products include stringent quality-control measures that are used from the time materials arrive at our plant to the point the product is placed on the truck for shipment. These are supported, maintained and improved through our ISO 9001 quality system.

MCC: Do employees play a part in quality control or is that an automated process?

CSI: CSI has a comprehensive quality and product-testing process. All incoming raw materials are sampled and tested to ensure they meet specifications. Finished products are sampled and tested as well to ensure consistent batch-to-batch quality.

On a broader scale, quality is the responsibility of every CSI employee, not just the quality control department. All employees are empowered and encouraged to bring quality concerns to the attention of management as soon as they are recognized. Every CSI employee is involved with and supports our ISO 9001 quality system.

MCC: How has CSI changed the way the industry washes cars?

CSI: We have led the crusade to eliminate HF and ABF from our customer's washes. In this quest we have developed safe, effective alternatives to products using those ingredients. We were the first company to give the operator a totally non-corrosive set of products that are safe for his people, equipment, facilities and his customer's vehicle.

MCC: What trends do you see happening in the carwash industry?

CSI: Effective equipment and solution products that give the customer a clean vehicle will always be of primary importance in this industry. However, as the industry matures it will become increasingly important

for the operator to differentiate his wash from that of the competition. How well the operator markets his wash will impact his wash volume as well as his overall profitability.

MCC: How is your company responding to those trends?

CSI: We spent considerable time and money in the development of our consumer-friendly Lustra brand. Having a brand was the first step to being able to supply marketing materials that would drive operator volumes and the sale of added-value products. At this year's Car Care World Expo, we introduced our 12 Lustra bear balloon to attract attention and increase traffic as well as a five-message board bear that the operator could use to promote his specials and drive those all important upper wash package sales.

MCC: Tell me about your company's plans for the next five or 10 years.

CSI: We will continue to build on our brand and drive the marketing aspect of our business. Additionally, we see the industry doing more business electronically. We have continued to drive and improve the utilization of our Web site. Currently, we use our Web site to process distributor product orders and design custom marketing signage. We have also put our electronic call reporting system for our distribution (SMART) on to the Web. This system allows the distributor salesperson to forward electronic call reports to his office with copies to the operator.

MCC: Is there anything else you would like to add?

CSI: We remain committed to going to market through our worldwide network of distributors. Local expertise and warehousing of our products remains the best way to assure that the operator gets the ultimate in customer service. We support those distributors with in-field factory sales personnel to help train their people and provide additional support as needed. The old adage of thinking globally but acting locally has proved to be successful for CSI as we have just enjoyed our 29th year of successive growth. ☺