Interview with PDQ’s new General Manager - Elizabeth Gubrud-Howe

We sat down with Elizabeth Gubrud-Howe at the NACS Show to discuss her new position as General Manager of PDQ as well as the state of the car wash market and the growing trend towards friction washes, among other things. Prior to joining PDQ, Gubrud-Howe was the National Sales Manager for OPW’s Midland Manufacturing business. She is bubbly, smart and wants to bring more fun into her new job.

For over 30 years, PDQ Manufacturing, Inc has provided the car wash industry with cutting-edge technological advances in car wash equipment and car wash systems. The OPW-owned brand manufactures both touchless and friction car wash equipment.

Elizabeth, you were appointed General Manager of PDQ less than a month ago. What are your goals and expectations for the company and yourself?

My immediate expectation is to grow the company. We have an awesome product and I have been tasked to find a way to sell more of that product. For myself, I have two goals for working at PDQ: the first is that I want to have fun – I go into any job wanting to have fun – and the second is that I want to become a better leader. So, have fun and get better.

There is a growing demand for in-bay automatic car wash systems in the U.S. Do you expect this to continue?

We definitely see that growing in two main places: in small c-store chains and with individual investors. My parents are from Portland (Oregon) and I often call them to talk about car washes, and they continually come to me and say “we see these (in-bay automatics) nowhere in the West Coast. Nobody can see PDQ.” So I definitely see some opportunities and real growth there.

With many machines now being internet-connected systems some experts raising concerns about “security”. How does a company like PDQ take care of that area?

Any time that anything is connected to the Internet there is a risk. PDQ takes Internet security very seriously and we do everything that we can to ensure that we don’t have an issue on the other side.

Do you think the rise of fuel prices could have a negative effect on the growth of the U.S. car wash industry?
We are sure hoping that growth in the car wash sector continues. In regards to your question, absolutely, if people have more disposable income they spend it on things like car washes, Doritos and different things in a convenience store. What we have done over the last couple of years is try to build loyalty programs that bring people back to the carwash regardless of the economy.

Traditionally, the U.S. market has been keener on touchless car wash technology than friction, while Europe is the opposite. Do you see any shifts in those preferences?

In the United States we absolutely see people moving to a friction machine when it the past it was touchless. A couple of things that are driving that. For one, paint technology has changed significantly. I remember when in the 90’s you used to come into a carwash and those big cloth things would just beat on your car... The technology has changed dramatically, so it is no longer cloth that is applied there, and the sensors – in the way that the friction moves around the car – make it much better and safer for the car.

PDQ has tapped into the idea of colourful foam and glowing lights. Is this something that could be a success abroad? Or is it something tailor-made for the U.S. market?

I think everyone wants to have fun in a carwash, so do I think that “fun” can be expanded? Absolutely!

What did you make of your first NACS Show?

Well, I’ve gained about five pounds eating candy and chicken wings, and drinking soda pops. But in all seriousness, it’s been a great opportunity to meet the community, our competitors and the industry as a whole.

*PDQ presented its new in-bay car wash system at the NACS Show. You can check it out in our PetrolPlaza Video Review.*