

# Bubbles Laundry— Rejuvenating Business with a New ‘Express Lane’ of High-Speed Washers

By Haley Jorgensen

When Ann Whitehead, owner of Bubbles Laundry, a card-operated laundry in Everett, Wash., decided to purchase the company from her brother in 1994, she undertook the immense task of raising up a floundering business.

“My brother owned the company, then named Coin-O-Matic, back in 1969, and it thrived. In fact, in 1970, it was awarded the Coin-Op Beautiful Contest regional award, presented by *Coin-Op Magazine*,” says Whitehead. In 1987, the company switched hands to new owners outside the family, and the once flourishing business started to falter. Whitehead’s brother reacquired the business through foreclosure in 1994. “I decided to purchase it from him and try to get it back on its feet again,” says Whitehead.

Since then, business has steadily improved, but nothing has impacted the store’s value and success more than Whitehead’s recent decision to replace a lane of 18-pound capacity hard-mount washers with 22 20-pound capacity Continental high-speed E-Series washers.

“The business was doing just fine, but after I became interested in the new high-efficiency machines on the market, I had to purchase some for myself,” she says. “Since installing the 22 high-speed washers, we have increased our customer base by seven percent, improved the store’s net profit by over \$1,000 a month and decreased overall utilities from 30 to 13 percent of total revenue. Our business hasn’t been the same since!”

## Introducing a Lane of High-speed Washer-extractors

In 2007, Whitehead’s laundry was running well, but utility bills sapped profits. The 3,440-square-foot store provided wash-

dry-fold, as well as vending machines and video games. Bubbles Laundry also served commercial clients, including a tugboat company that required clean bedding and laundry.

“We had plenty of business and our machines were less than five years old,” she says. “They were operating well, but I couldn’t help but be bothered by the outrageous cost of our utilities, especially the sewer and water.”

In the fall of 2007, with the assistance of Washington Automated, a laundry equipment distributor in Everett, Wash., Whitehead replaced her hard-mounts with Continental E-Series Washer-Extractors. In essence, Whitehead had created an “Express Lane” of high-speed Continental washers—allowing customers to wash and dry their laundry in 60 minutes or less.

The 22 freestanding Continental machines replaced a lane of hard-mount Dexter double-loaders and three extractors. Whitehead selected the high-speed replacements for both their efficiency and freestanding design. Because they are freestanding, the new washers were easy to install, are easier to service and maintain and are more efficient than traditional hard-mounts, she says. “The hard-mount washers used too much water and had no high-speed extraction,” she says.

## The High-speed Difference

The new washers, on the other hand,



Once a show store, Bubbles Laundry became a miser after years of neglect. Owner, Ann Whitehead, breathed new life into the laundry by updating with Continental E-Series Washers. The washers have saved the store tremendously in utilities—resulting in a \$1000 per month savings.

reach extract speeds of 300 G-force, so more water is removed from each load and less time is needed in the dryers, maintains Whitehead. “The difference between a load coming out of a high-speed washer and a load coming out of an extractor is almost non-existent. The 300 G-force extract does an excellent job of removing water,” she says. “When you calculate how much time you save both in the washer and in the dryer, the difference is hard to ignore.” With the hard-mount machines, it took 63 minutes to completely wash and dry a load. “Using the Continentals, customers can complete a load of laundry in an average of 47 minutes. In the end, this equates to a time-savings of 25.4 percent for our customers,” she says.

Moreover, Whitehead cuts gas usage. Because dry-time has significantly



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Owner of Bubbles Laundry, Ann Whitehead, attests that her store's new Continental E-Series Washers are the most popular and profitable machines.

decreased thanks to the high extract speeds of the washers, so has the store's gas consumption.

### Drastic Decrease in Utilities

The machines are so popular that they now handle more than a third of the laundry's workload. "Thirty five percent of all of our laundry goes through the new washers," maintains Whitehead. Bubbles Laundry is card operated, which makes it easy for her to determine where the store is saving money. Since she installed the Continental E-Series Washers, she saves an estimated 16.9 percent on electricity bills, 11.5 percent on natural gas and 35 percent on water. "What that essentially equates to is a savings of over \$1,000 a month on utilities," she says.

"Our city council just approved a 25.6 percent water/sewer rate hike, which will be divided into a three-step incremental increase over the next three years," adds Whitehead. The first step in that rate increase starts in January 2009. To prepare, the local utility company began replacing old water meters. Right before the meter at Bubbles Laundry was replaced, Whitehead had installed the lane of high-speed Continentals. "After replacing not only my meter, but also the meter for my nearest competitor, the work crew came back the next morning to check on the functionality of the new meter," says Whitehead. "At the same time, my customers were taking advantage of our morning reduced-pricing special on the new Continental washers, and only the Continentals were being used at the time. The utility work crew stood

around scratching their heads because the display on the water meter was barely moving! The crew foreman said that my new meter tested out perfectly but he couldn't understand why my meter was moving so slowly when my nearest competitor's meter was 'spinning like a top.'" Whitehead quickly explained to the foreman that the new high-speed washers use considerably less water than her old machines, and her competitor's machines.

### Efficiency Equals Satisfaction for Customers

Beyond savings in utilities, the new lane of high-speeds has boosted Bubbles Laundry's net worth, as they are the store's most popular and profitable machines, according to Whitehead. "Time is a commodity for our customers, and if we can save them a few extra minutes, they are satisfied," she says. "It took 27 minutes to wash a load of clothes in the old washers, and now it only takes 19 minutes on hot, warm or cold. Using Continental's Superwash cycle it takes just 23 minutes. Now customers can be in and out of the store with clean laundry in less than 60 minutes."

"The customers enjoy the faster cycle times with the Continentals so much that

they were constantly asking to speed up the older machines," says Whitehead. She responded by eliminating a rinse cycle on the old machines. "Even though the old hard-mount equipment still uses way more water than my new washers,

the savings in water is significant," she says. Since the addition of the high-speed lane of Continentals and the shortened cycles on the old machines, water usage dropped from 67,200 cubic feet to 43,600 cubic feet within a 61-day billing period.

The new machines save customers time and boast 4.2 turns on average per day. Now Whitehead gets more money for each wash. She raised the machines' vend prices by 17 percent because they are

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in such high demand.

Thanks to more revenue per machine and a significant cut in utilities, the high-speed washers are responsible for the store's recent surge in business and profits.

No wonder Whitehead is in the process of replacing six of the store's 40-pound capacity hard-mount Dexter washers with 40-pound capacity, high-speed Continental E-Series Washers. In two years, she hopes to have replaced all her hard-mount machines with Continental high-speeds.