

Making the Change

Eight Considerations when Adopting a New Parking Management System



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Introduction

Making any change to your parking management business practice can be a daunting process. Whether the change is something minor in nature such as painting your facility or something major in scope, such as the implementation of a new parking management system, the change will apply a level of stress on your staff and your parking patrons. To ensure the change will be effective and prudent, and most importantly, yields the expected results, planning is key.

#1: Put First Things First

If you are considering implementing a new Parking Management System, clearly identify the business reasons for such an implementation. Will you offer different parking options to your patrons? Has your operating environment changed so significantly that current systems no longer meet your needs? Has your city or campus adopted a development plan that necessitates changes in parking management? Is your current system nearing end-of-life and maintenance costs are too high and reliability is suffering? Are you intending to reduce operational staff? Are you expanding patron payment processes? Are the data mining / business analysis requirements of your operation not being met by your current system? These are some of the high-level business needs questions that should be addressed early on in any new system implementation initiative.

Gather as much information as you can to determine both direct and indirect project costs. Evaluate your staffing and determine any associated changes in job descriptions and required training. Examine typical and atypical service needs and consider whether the associated system support will be an in-house effort or outsourced. Diligence is important. Visit other operations using technology and processes you are considering. Discuss with other operations their lessons learned, changes in their operation and staffing, and their patron adoption challenges.



Effective signage is key to a successful transition.

Once you identify and explore the targeted changes and improvements that will result from the implementation of a new system, it is important to gather all of the internal constituent groups. This could include facilities, IT, procurement, administration, finance, engineering, legal, student government, city council or any other internal group that may provide assistance and/or are affected by any changes to the business model.

In addition, it is important to identify any potential external organization or department that could be affected by your decision. For example, if you are considering adopting a new special event pre-payment policy in a downtown parking garage, you need to consider the local street absorption capability and involve the city's traffic department. If you are considering changing parking enforcement on campus, the neighborhoods around campus could be affected with spillover parking.

#2: Start The Conversation Now

Once you have outlined a plan and secured buy-in from all the associated groups you have identified, develop a communication strategy. Understand that people are generally resistant to change – more so when the change is thrust upon them with little or no notification. Spend the time and effort to craft project announcements that clearly identify operational and customer service benefits. Provide realistic timelines and include specific milestones that can be easily confirmed. Convey success. Include specific cost of ownership advantages. However, be careful not to emphasize increased revenue as a standalone project goal.

#3: Operational Changes

The implementation of any new system will by its nature require changes to procedures and in most case, policies as well. It is important to keep in mind the entire operational ecosystem: from the counter staff that address customer service issues to the finance staff that process citation payments and confirm credit card processed totals, to the staff that load receipt stock in the devices, to enforcement officers, to the operational audit staff.

All need to be integrated into the transition plan as early as possible. Their involvement creates an atmosphere of ownership and they are far more likely to support your decisions if they are included. Staff members may be worried about losing their jobs or being reassigned to another position. Emphasize the change is an opportunity for personal and professional growth.

One of the most significant parameters in measuring the success of a project is how quickly and effectively your immediate staff will holistically adopt the new system. If your staff believes in the product, process and intended goals; they will work with you. If they do not, their resistance and anxiety will spread throughout your entire organization and to your parking patrons.

#4: Relax, It Takes Everyone Time To Adjust

You will have issues. There is no way around it. However, with careful planning and preemptive testing, you can keep the issues to a minimum. During any transition, include increased temporary staffing to address patron questions: especially in those instances with significant changes in patron behavior such as the implementation of Pay-on-Foot machines. Be clear, consistent, and concise when providing instructions to patrons.

Do not discount the importance of effective signage and other marketing and communications tactics. Prior to actual transition, role-play in different what-if scenarios. If your staff does not know what to do in a specific situation, what kind of message does that convey to the public?

Training modules should be an important part of any deliverable, and you need to confirm that all departments attend training on their specific modules as well as any related business needs module. Cross-train those staff members that monitor overall operations such as supervisors or customer service ambassadors.

#5: Increasing Your Revenue And Saving Costs

Often parking operations will see an increase in net revenue after a management system implementation. Many factors can contribute to this and increases are always welcome. However, success should also include diminished overall cost of ownership, increased operational effectiveness, patron satisfaction, and improved parking inventory management.

Depending on the system you choose, your patrons may now be able to do most of their business with the parking office online, eliminating the hassle of coming to the parking office and alleviating your team's stress from dealing with angry patrons. Your garage parkers may bypass the cashier altogether after paying for parking at the Pay-on-Foot machine. There will be fewer dismissed citations because the officers will now get payment status from the Pay-by-Space system in real time before issuing a citation.

In some instances, the increase in automated processes may allow you to eliminate a full or part-time employee. This does not mean you will be inclined to let someone go immediately, but it may allow you to avoid hiring a replacement the next time one of your staff members leaves.

#6: Integrating With Current Or Future-Planned Systems

Concise and practical data is a very real commodity in any system-based transportation and parking management operation. Having extracted data in a usable form allows management to address current trends and plan for future anticipated needs. If the data to be collected exists in different but concurrent systems, data sharing can be an effective method for overall macro transportation planning. An open platform software solution will allow you to import and export data to/from other systems, parking and non-parking related (payroll,

finance, student information, court), assuming your other systems can import and requirements can be met.

To make this a reality, discussions with representatives from considered data sources need to be had. Develop a list of your needs and wants for the new solution describing content, refresh, duration, and search parameters.

#7: You Get Out What You Put In

Your organization and your solution provider are a team. Project success is predicated on each of you and the collaborative environment fostered by all. Each team should have a primary project manager empowered to manage their project components. Timely and effective communication is critical. It is important to invest the time and energy into the process and develop a plan that is comprehensive, inclusive, practical, and attainable.

#8: Do Not Be Afraid To Reach Out

Your user community is a valuable asset. Whatever problem you face with the new system, another user has almost certainly faced something similar. The parking professionals community is extremely collaborative, and you will be hard pressed to find someone who is not willing to help. Your vendor will also have a consulting aspect to their team. These people are experts on your new system and should be able to answer any questions you may have and help get the most out of the changes your team makes.