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Circle # 119 on Reader Service Card

Property Owners Want Integrity; Operators Say They Want Low Price

Last month, *Parking Today* published responses from Commercial Operators as to the biggest concerns they have in dealing with clients, and what they thought were the biggest concerns that their clients, the Facility Owners, have. This month, we turned the tables and asked the Owners what their biggest concerns are when hiring Operators.

Fully 75 percent of the Owners mentioned integrity and profitability in their responses, while one-third of Operators thought Owners wanted integrity and profitability.

One-third of the Operators thought that the biggest concerns of Owners would be integrity and the profitability of the location. However, Operators thought that the price charged was also very important to Owners. Operators, it seems, believe that the quality of their management skills was extremely important to Owners.

Based on this very unscientific finding, Operators need to work on the perception of their honesty and integrity, and Owners need to communicate their need for this trait more successfully in their Requests for Quotations. Let's face it, Owners, the Commercial Operators think all you care about is cost. How are you going to get the highest quality company if the companies you interview truly believe all you care about is the lowest price?

The Owners' responses follow:

Be honest in all things. Follow through on all aspects, even if you bid too low just to get the contract. Don't make the owner pay for your mistakes or arrogance. The owner should not have to watch you like a hawk or chase you down for every little thing just to make sure you are doing your job as per the contract. Provide full accounting and back-up documents without having to be asked.

Be honest and above board in all things.

-- Ken Petry, Manager, Parking Facilities,
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority

Attention to detail. Timely reports. Always looking for ways to increase revenue. Good maintenance program. Team players. Bring solutions to the table. Depth of experience.

-- Clark C. Rice, CPP,
Kemper Development Co.

- 1) The company's reputation within the geographical area where they are conducting business.
- 2) The professionalism and the commitment to customer service of the parking staff and management.
- 3) The ability of the company to produce profit without sacrificing the quality of their service.

-- Doug Moore,
FDC Enterprises



Does the company have a reputation for honesty and integrity?

Is the company "deep enough" to provide the proper levels of staffing needed in our facilities (especially on those days when someone calls in sick or when a special project is requested)?

Does its corporate office provide a high level of support to its managers and other employees (e.g., training, new technology, methods of reporting)?

-- Anne I. Hayes,
St. Paul Travelers

The ideal operator would be a company with a trustworthy record: that is, a company motivated to hold down costs while at the same time increasing customer service.

The answer to this question is often hidden in the type of agreement the customer chooses.

With a Concession agreement, there is little incentive for the operator to increase or maintain customer service. With the Management agreement, there is little incentive for the operator to hold down costs. If the customer has the will and is interested, the "self-rule" option seems the best, since customer service and budget control are completely up to the airport.

-- Stuart Gilbert,
State of Alaska DOT

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Property Owners Want Integrity; Operators Say They Want Low Price

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No. 1 is complete management, free of problems for the owner.

No. 2 is profit.

No. 3 is attention to detail and complete reporting.

-- David Felt,
Gibraltar Finance

Listen, not assume.

Prepare a proposal for my operation.

Listen again.

-- Collins S. Downing, Manager,
Loyola Transportation

It is most important to have correct accountability. When hiring an operator to manage your facility, it is very easy to forget to "audit" all activity. Also, good customer service skills is a key factor and, as always, low costs!

-- Allen Saunders,
qWest Center

Efficient and effective operations, based on written policies and procedures that are specific to each garage/lot.

Effective communications that inform and protect the owner's and management company's interests. This should include appropriate reporting. (I require a rotation of parker lists -- alphabetically by parker one month, card number the next month, and alphabetically by tenant the following month. That way I have reports no older than one quarter for quick reference in my office, and it ensures that the operator maintains current records.)

Cash and system controls and reporting to provide assurance of economic performance.

-- D. Dillard,
Trinity Partners

Security, location and cost. Followed by convenience and cleanliness.

-- John Conley,
Barco Products

Innovative approach to marketing and customer service in order to increase volumes.

Comprehensive and timely reporting capabilities.

Justification for a long-term partnership arrangement.

-- Larry Schneider,
ARRB Transport Research

Experience. Innovation. Fidelity.

-- Wallace Heggie, CPPB,
City of Meridian, MS

Items to consider:

- 1) Operational costs.
- 2) Operator's familiarity with the local market.
- 3) Operator's creative thinking in increasing revenue.
- 4) Qualifications of the manager assigned to the facility.

-- Dilip Nandwana,
International Parking Design

Relevant experience of operator/local GM with size, complexity, speed, type of operation like ours.

Integrity of GM, AGM.

Relevant creative problem-solving in technology, management, personnel/union issues.

Lack of upline micromanaging from operator's managers.

We want the local GM to spend time solving our issues not needed to placate

the regional managers or above.

There's a start.

-- Rick Decker,
Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport

We're a non-hub airport that has struggled since 9/11. The things important to us are:

1. Price of operator's service.

2. Flexibility in staffing.

3. Structure of agreement (i.e., how are costs shared, how is risk shared, how are costs controlled, how are operators rewarded for good service, etc.).

-- Glenn Januska,
Sioux City (IA) Airport

Customer service is important, but revenue control is also right up there. In the last five years, I have internalized two outside parking operations. The daily revenue at the first location more than doubled, and at the second location, it more than quadrupled. My feeling is that most of the operators want a lot of locations, but they really do not have the expertise to control them.

A few years ago, my Southern counterpart was in town and I arranged to tour a local garage with new pay-on-foot equipment. The garage was run by an outside operator. I asked the manager what the monthly/yearly gross was. His answer: "I don't know." This was the worst answer that could be given.

I've heard the saying that a good manager can manage anyone. My actual belief is that that may work in other places; however, in parking management -- particularly audit control -- you need parking expertise.

-- Joe Randisi,
Kaiser Permanente

Honesty. Integrity. Great customer service and responsiveness.

-- Glen Sicard,
University of Rochester

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Property Owners Want Integrity; Operators Say They Want Low Price

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Good, auditable reporting records.
Great service at a fair price.
Professional appearance (polite, clean employees, etc.).

-- Brian West,
Crystal Asset Management

1. Know the product.
2. Show up for work, and then work hard.
3. Remember at all times that the caller is the customer.
Treat the caller with that respect.
4. Always end with a thank you.

-- Kent Blackwell,
AFE Industries

The ability to pull up requested information immediately .

Control and knowledge of its on-site staff

-- Michael Eismann,
SG Detroit

Understanding of parking equipment. (Please don't vandalize those printers if they are out of ink, and don't blame the software when there is a fried hard disk inside the terminal.)

Understanding the software. (There is no magic to software. Every unknown error or problem is not a software glitch.)

Honesty. (Those reports don't match 'cause your people steal and auditors are not smart enough to compare the shift close-out reports with the system-generated reports.)

-- Nikhil Joshi,
company or ??

Support the company mission.
Good personality.
Adaptability with parking.

-- Chuck Smallwood,
Scripps

- 1) Professional and courteous communication skills.
- 2) Ability to handle issues independently.
- 3) Follow-through to ensure that issues are resolved.

-- Nancy Bao,
Children's National Medical Center

Although ours is not a commercial operation, I look for Integrity, Dependability and People Skills.

A person may not remember what you said or what you did, but they will always remember how you made them feel.

-- Ssgt. C.M. Truitt,
University of Southern Indiana

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Two Capital Cities in the UK Ma

The cities of London and Edinburgh have made major changes in how they deal with traffic and parking. A year ago in London, the city began to charge \$8.50 for each private vehicle driving into the central city. The goals? To reduce congestion in the clogged center of London and generate upwards of \$180 million per year in revenue.

Six months ago, the city of Edinburgh put in place a program to allow its citizens to use their cell phones to pay their on-street parking. So, what are the results?

Here are two articles taken from the pages of *Parking News*, the publication of the British Parking Association.

'Congestion Charge' Lowers Traffic, and Parking Revenue, in London

Opponents of the London plan claim that in addition to reducing traffic, the "congestion charge" has also reduced parking revenue. Recently, Westminster Council blamed the charge for a massive \$15 million drop in parking revenue. Fewer cars in London mean less to spend on transport projects, the council says.

Others say that reducing congestion was the whole point of the measure in the first place and that reduced numbers of cars mean that it is working.

Michele Dix of the London Transport Agency talks to Ian Round from the British Parking Association's *Parking News* about the first full year of "congestion charging" in London

"When we spoke more than a year ago, 'congestion charging' was just a clever idea. The scheme had been planned to the last detail, but up to Feb. 17, 2003, it was all theory; congestion charging had no significant track record anywhere, let alone in the center of a major city like London. So, one year in, how's it been? Has it been a happy birthday for you?"

Yes, but it's been London's happy birthday, not just mine! Congestion charging's been a big success for the capital. The traffic's moving a lot better, and that was the main aim of the whole project, you remember.

How has the year worked out?

This has been the largest single traffic management experiment of its kind anywhere. When we were planning the scheme, we had all sorts of research studies and projections, but that was all. Now we have a year's

experience to draw on, and plenty of facts and measurements covering the whole period.

Our primary aim was to get Central London moving, and we forecast that a daily charge at the \$7.50 level would reduce congestion in the controlled area by between 20 percent and 30 percent. In the end, we did the 30 percent, which was brilliant. We also estimated that traffic levels would be between 10 percent and 15 percent lower, and again we hit the top end of the band: 15 percent.

What these figures mean is that journeys in Central London can now be shorter and more reliable, and the distribution of goods and services has been considerably improved. London is no longer choking in its own traffic, as it was before.

What about the fears of disruption and extra problems for traffic outside the zone?

Our surveys show that this hasn't happened. If anything, there have been improvements in traffic flow outside the charging zone, particularly on London's radial routes, because of the smaller number of vehicles moving through toward the controlled area.

What about all the charges you have collected? You were originally forecasting net revenue in excess of \$160 million dollars.

That figure came from the mid-range of our estimates for traffic reduction. What actually happened was that we hit the top end of all our projections, and the result was that there were considerably fewer vehicles to pay the charge. We were victims of our own success, if you like.



Also, many more drivers claimed exemptions or discounts than we had anticipated. Nevertheless, our net revenue this year will be around \$100 million after all administration and collection costs have been taken out. And next year we expect to exceed that.

How much has evasion of payment been a feature of the scheme?

At first, perhaps it was, because our enforcement measures weren't fully active, and the penalty procedures themselves needed time to kick in. It's certainly not been a problem for us, and we don't expect it to be.

The movement of people in London and the methods they choose can be incredibly complex. What about the wider picture?

You're right. So far we've talked just about road traffic, which is only one way Londoners move to work or go shopping or sightseeing or whatever. What we have found has been a cascade effect, where travelers have systematically moved from one mode of transport to another.

It works this way. The car drivers who no longer drive regularly in the charging zone seem mostly to have moved onto the Underground. At the same time, many Underground users have moved onto the buses because

Continued on Next Page

Like Parking and Traffic Changes

they're cheaper and now much quicker and reliable than they were. This was why we were anxious to increase the bus fleet. Even before the scheme started, 500 extra buses had been added to the routes crossing Central London, and the overall increase is now 560 extra buses, which is 23 percent more than we had before. In fact, the bus service has been a considerable beneficiary from congestion charging. Quite apart from all the

extra vehicles, the service is generally greatly improved, with a 60 percent reduction in excess wait time.

London is made up of a great variety of communities, often with considerable diversities within each. Has congestion charging affected some boroughs more than others?

I'm sure that this is so, but our studies are not yet complete. We carried out benchmark studies all over

London before congestion charging started, analyzing pre-existing journey patterns. Now we shall repeat these studies and be able to determine what shifts there have been in each area and how much these have been caused or modified by congestion charging in the central zone. It should be highly interesting and help us enormously in our future planning.

Edinburgh Mobile Parking Update

Last January, Parking News covered the story of the new mPark system in Scotland's capital city. It is now more than six months since the launch of Edinburgh's mPark system and worth revisiting the project. But first, a quick review:

The mPark system, supplied by Itsmobile, enables motorists in Edinburgh to pay for parking at pay-and-display terminals via their cell phones, thus helping to make parking more convenient and stress free for the motorist.

The implementation followed the commissioning of a new centrally monitored P-and-D system in spring 2003, comprising 500 solar-powered P-and-D terminals from Parkeon. Following installation, the terminals were linked, via Transcomm's business critical wireless data network, to a PC running Parkfolio Supervision Centralization software in the Edinburgh Council's parking department.

The mPark system requires a resilient and secure wireless data network to provide "always-on" consistently high performance due to the timely and critical nature of the information being sent from the P-and-D terminals. Transcomm's dedicated, data-only network was selected as it consistently provides the Edinburgh Council with a reliable, high level of service and it does not have to carry the millions of voice calls that could affect the performance of GSM and GPRS data services.

One of the key advantages for the

Council in implementing mPark pay-and-display is that it does not have to change its existing parking enforcement processes. Attendants simply have the ticket displayed in each vehicle as usual. In other systems, the attendant is required to scan the vehicle and have a handheld device that reports on the parking payment status of the car.

Nor did the Council have to make any legislative changes before introducing the system, since drivers are still issued with a P-and-D parking ticket. Cell phone-based parking schemes that do not issue a ticket or receipt require changes in legislation to Permit Enforcement and, ultimately, for fines to be levied in respect of non-payment of parking fees or overstaying the time purchased.

Transcomm's network facilitates the centralized control of Edinburgh's P-and-D system, enabling the terminals to send electronic messages to alert officials to a range of incidences, such as ticket supplies needing replenishing. Such information is required to protect and optimize parking revenues and to enhance customer service by ensuring that drivers always have access to operational P-and-D terminals. The program also records each terminal's operational status on a 24-hour basis, details of which call help eliminate parking disputes.

So that is the setup, but how is it going? The Edinburgh Council will recover the costs of providing the



mPark system if the average value of transactions carried out via cell phones is approximately 30 percent higher than the average value of cash transactions.

Brian Butler, Parking Operations Manager for the city of Edinburgh, said: "We have 2,430 registered users with an average of 1,100 mPark transactions per week. Our average mPark transaction is \$4.00, compared with the average cash transaction of \$2.25, which means that the public is taking advantage of and appreciating the flexibility of both options. At this stage of the program, we are very pleased with its progress and the feedback received from the public."

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Cubic Purchases Traf-Park

Cubic Transportation Systems, Inc., a subsidiary of San Diego-based Cubic Corporation, has acquired Traf-Park, Inc. of Quebec, Canada, a leading provider of automated parking systems in North and South America.

The acquisition marks the first step in a strategic roadmap to broaden Cubic's core business in fare collection systems for public transportation by expanding its products and services group. The group will focus on leveraging Cubic's smart card systems technology for additional commuter service applications, such as parking. Traf-Park's current customer base includes mass transit operators, universities, hospitals, parking operators, museums, airports, hotels and exhibition centers.

Roy McCormick, President and CEO of Spots Parking commented, "Traf-Park has been a preferred supplier of parking systems equipment and services to Spots Parking for a number of years now. We are delighted to see Traf-Park joining with Cubic as this will enable the combined company to lead the introduction of new parking system functionality and services that will address our industry's evolving needs."

Jim Schleifer, vice president of products and services for Cubic Transportation Systems, Inc., will be the president of the new wholly-owned subsidiary of Cubic.

"Cubic's acquisition of Traf-Park is consistent with our vision and strategy of expanding automated fare collection systems technology to commuter-oriented solutions that allow greater regional interoperability of smart card-based systems and increase the utility of transit patrons' smart cards outside the transit system," said Schleifer. "This is another step in establishing new market strategies and alliances that will expand markets we serve into other related applications including parking, event ticketing, security and access control."

Pierre Blouin, who founded Traf-Park in 1990, will remain active in the company as vice president, business development, leveraging the strengths of the two companies to accelerate both parking and transit systems sales worldwide.

"We are excited about this venture and the opportunities it presents to expand the core offerings of two leading revenue collection suppliers for complementary markets," said Blouin. "Our commitment to our current customers not only remains our top priority, but will be fortified through the additional resources of Cubic's services business."

Every year, nearly 10 billion rides are taken worldwide using Cubic fare collection systems. Cubic has delivered over 400 projects in 40 major markets on five continents. Active projects include London, New York / New Jersey region, Washington, D.C. / Baltimore / Virginia region, Los Angeles region, San Diego region, San Francisco, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago, Houston, Atlanta, South Florida, Vancouver and Edmonton, Canada, Brisbane, Australia, Singapore, Bangkok, Thailand, and Scandinavia.

The corporation's other major segment, Cubic Defense Applications, provides realistic combat training systems for military forces as well as simulation, force modernization, educational services, operations & maintenance and manufacturing services. The group also supplies products and systems for C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance) applications, search and rescue avionics and radio communications for military and civil markets. For more information about Cubic, see the company's web site at www.cubic.com.

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Circle # 247 on Reader Service Card

Application of ALPR In Parking Facilities

By Jim Kennedy

This is the first of two installments on Automatic License Plate Recognition systems by Jim Kennedy. He has been involved in the video industry since the mid-1970s, with a particular interest in closed-circuit video as it applies to traffic observation, and, over the past eight years, with vehicle license plate capture technology. (In the second installment, Kennedy will discuss the details of problems with mismatched license plate numbers.)

Just a few years ago, it appeared that the parking industry was ready to adopt the technology developed for toll roads whereby the license plate of a vehicle was captured by a camera and “read” through the use of some clever algorithms to which the image had been sent. The result was that the license plate number was now in a data format much as it would be if someone had typed it into the system and could, therefore, be associated with a transaction and/or ticket number.

For a variety of reasons, the technology has been slow to be incorporated into the revenue management side of parking systems, in spite of those early hopeful signals. The same was true of toll roads at one time, but once the value of the technology was proven, ALPR (Automatic License Plate Recognition) soon became an accepted piece of the toll violation process.

In one sense, there are no “violators” in parking, but there are those who would attempt to thwart the system. They are often referred to as “cheaters,” and those who successfully cheat the system can cost the parking management company a great deal of money.

There has been some debate lately over the actual size of the pay-for-space parking industry. The numbers range from about \$11 billion to as much as \$20 billion. Let's make it simple and say it is “only” \$10 billion. If parking cheaters represent just 1 percent, it would result in losses equal to \$100 million through such fraud. Even if it is only one-half of 1 percent, it is still \$50 million. What if it is more? A 2 percent fraud would be \$200 million. In any event, it is real money, no matter what the potential for parking fraud might prove to be.

ALPR is intended to minimize or even eliminate those losses by verifying that the car now at the exit is the same car as the one that took the ticket at entry. In short, the license plate is read at entry and the license plate number, along with the ticket/transaction number, is sent to a cen-



Automatic License Plate Recognition systems are intended to eliminate losses caused by parking “cheaters”.

If parking cheaters represent just 1%, it would result in losses equal to \$100 million.

tral database. When the car eventually arrives at the exit cashier, the license plate is again read and the license plate number is sent to the central database, where the associated ticket number is found. The license plate number just read at the exit is compared with the license plate number that was read at entry and which is associated with the ticket number. A matching algorithm compares both numbers and gives a notification to the exit cashier, or some remote supervisor's station, indicating “match” or “no match.”

It is thought by some that with a very accurate ALPR system, tickets may become a thing of the past. The idea being that the entire entry and exit verification and fee calculation could be done from the license plate information. For a variety of reasons, the least of which is not the tactile record the ticket provides, a ticket-less system is probably still a bit into the future.

One of the more visible segments of the parking industry -- and the one that has made ALPR technology a viable feature for aiding revenue management -- is airport parking. In the past few years, several airports have incorporat-

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