— Amenities —

Customer service platforms are becoming essential

Imagine being stuck at a parking garage's exit on a cold winter night, unable to leave because the gate won't go up. For many people, it's not a difficult scenario to envision, because it has happened to them.

Over the past decade, parking facilities have become nearly universally automated. Equipment that automates parking access and egress provides many benefits to owners and operators. It reduces operational costs significantly, it cuts down on the risk of employee theft and it provides a much more user-friendly parking experience – most of the time. Like any technology, parking equipment sometimes doesn't work as intended, and a human interaction is needed.

Misfires aren't always the fault of the equipment. The usefulness of parking technology – as with any equipment – is limited, not only by its functionality, but also by the ability of people to use it. There are many types of parking technologies in use, and drivers aren't always adept at using each one. Screens, button placement and user instructions vary from brand to brand, and that can cause confusion among parkers who are exposed to different types of equipment at different locales. Often, it's not the technology that's failing; it's the person who is failing to use it properly.

This is no minor issue. In the United States alone, parkers call into customer service representatives 85 million times a year to help solve issues related to automated parking equipment. Whether it's a matter of user error or a problem with the equipment, the customer service rep can solve the problem and get the drivers on their way.

Brian Wolff
President and CEO, Parker Technology, brian.wolff@ helpmeparker.com

If not addressed, when issues arise in a parking facility, the cost can be high. Drivers will avoid facilities in which they've experienced problems, or that have a reputation for problems. These types of issues can have a significant impact on the bottom line. However, integrated virtual support via customer service platforms can help avoid these issues and protect the bottom line.

■ **A personal touch.** What happens when a garage's equipment doesn't work as planned? You don't want drivers waiting behind a closed gate until a parking employee or enforcement officer can be summoned to handle the situation.

That's where a parking customer service platform comes in. The platforms are electronically connected to parking access and revenue control systems equipment and can be engaged with the push of a button. Parking owners and operators can turn to a company that specializes in customer service for parking and also has the software platform to manage it, or they can manage their own call center operations and utilize an outsourced customer service platform. The typical system provides a live audio connection to a trained customer service professional who can help solve the parker's problem. However, one system even offers two-way video calling so the customer service representative can see for himself what the issue is, in order to diagnose and solve the problem and provide a higher level of customer service.

■ **Measuring the metrics in real time.** For the parker, the end of the transaction is the end of the story, but not for the parking owner or operator. Every call is recorded, and that data is available to owners and operators. When utilized properly, it can help owners and operators improve their systems to minimize problems in the future, thus providing a better parking experience in parking facilities and making parking operations more effective and efficient.

Parking owners and operators have instant access to data about how many calls were made on a given day, week or month, and the nature of each call. For instance, owners and operators can monitor how many entry/exit issues, ghost calls, invalid validations or permits, credit card payment issues, invalid tickets or any other issues.

This information can be analyzed for any particular period or length of time.

This is information that parking owners and operators can use to improve their operations and customer service. For instance, if there is an excessive number of invalid tickets that could be an indication that the PARCS equipment located at the entrance is malfunctioning and needs
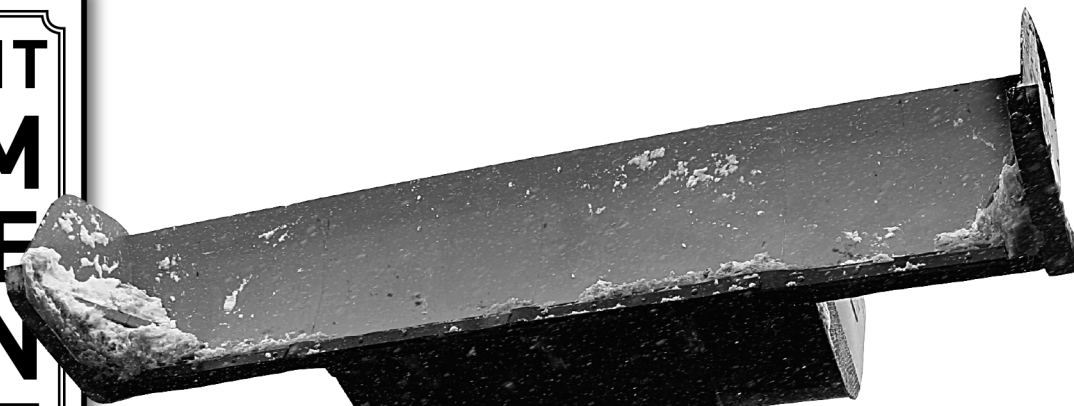
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to be repaired or replaced. The same conclusion might be drawn if there is an unusually high number of credit card payment issues. Or, if there are too many invalid validations or permits, it could indicate that the permit readers are malfunctioning or that the equipment that creates the permits themselves is. No matter what types of problems arise, the data created by the system can help diagnose the issues and help parking operators address them more efficiently and cost-effectively.

Because of all of these benefits, customer service platforms are popular throughout Colorado, with a number of parking garages in Denver utilizing it, including facilities owned by Douglas Parking, Denison Parking, One Parking and Cardinal Group. Customer service technology also has made it to Aspen after being installed in a municipal garage in the city. ▲