

# Adapting to Changing Consumer Expectations and Behavior

By Charley DeBow

Everything in life seems to be getting easier for people. If you have a question, you just ask Alexa. My wife and I haven't been to a supermarket to do regular food shopping in three years. Amazon Fresh, Blue Apron, and Amazon Pantry allow us to order 95 percent of our food online or by asking Alexa. CLEAR is my favorite service for airports, and I estimate it saved me more than \$1,000 in change fees alone when I didn't miss a flight because I could skip the TSA lines. Convenience just isn't enough; consumers want value. Don't be fooled into thinking they are one and the same.

According to Forrester Research, 77 percent of people say that valuing their time is the most important thing a company can do to provide them with good service. For the people who work in the parking industry, it is critical to understand these consumer trends because they have major business implications.

## Making Convenience a Priority

Consumers are no longer willing to tolerate poor experiences. They want to get in and out of the parking facility as quickly as possible without any hassle. And if you can't provide that level of service, they will probably look for another parking provider who can.

I fly to Atlanta twice a month. Last year, Uber/Lyft were banned from picking up curbside, and now I must walk to a separate area to meet my ride. The way to the new pick-up area means I walk past the taxi stand. In my mind, this was not a coincidence, and I started taking taxis again. Taxis have made up some ground in the battle with Uber/Lyft, and now in most larger cities have upgraded their cars and take credit cards (happily, I might add). You need to constantly evaluate not only your own operation but your competitor's opera-

tion as well. Uber is great but does not provide me enough value at the Atlanta airport to not just hop in a taxi.

## Creating a Positive Experience

If you think about your parking operation, you have to make sure you are doing everything you can to create a positive consumer experience at your lot. Here are some key questions you should be asking yourself:

- Is it easy for consumers to get into my facility?
- Is it easy for consumers to find a parking spot?
- Do consumers have to wait in a long line at a kiosk to pay for parking?

- Are consumers able to pay using the method they prefer: mobile app, cash, credit cards, etc.?
- Are consumers able to reserve parking in my lot ahead of time?
- Are consumers able to contact my customer service team if there are issues?

If the answer to many of these questions is no, you are probably not providing consumers with a great experience. Fortunately, there are technology solutions out there that can help in these areas.

If you are a parking provider, you need to think more about the consumer. The days of relying on cars simply showing up to your location are quickly ending. You are not just selling a parking spot, you are providing an experience. And if it's a good one, consumers will keep coming back. 



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