

# Let's Change the World's Perception of Parking

By Bill Smith, APR

Is there anything people complain about as much as parking? They complain they have to pay for it. Or when they can't find any. Or when they can't park for as long as they want to. Or when the space they found isn't convenient enough. I could go on, but my column space is limited.

What is it about parking that makes people have such a sense of entitlement while at the same time feeling anxiety and often anger? I think there are a few things at play. First is the traditional sense that parking has less value than other land uses. It's a viewpoint that became prevalent at the dawn of the automobile age, and it has never been effectively dispelled in spite of all of the evidence to the contrary.


parking can be a complex topic, and few reporters and editors make an effort to understand the complexities and explain them to readers, listeners, and viewers.

## What about Us?

We parking professionals bear as much—if not more—of the responsibility. We traditionally haven't done a good enough job of promoting the industry and the many advances that have been

Every organization should have a public relations strategy in place already to promote its brand or market its products or services. Public agencies should be using publicity and social media to explain local parking regulations and their benefits to the community; consultants and other service providers should be using publicity and social media to demonstrate the benefits of their services to the public and establish their expertise to prospective clients; and companies that provide technology and other products to parking owners should also already be using PR to market their products.

When municipal officials and their parking consultants publicize their plans and regulations, they help residents, visitors, and employees use parking services appropriately and demonstrate how parking policies support local businesses and improve the quality of life. Likewise, when parking designers and equipment providers promote the benefits of their products and services, they inform the public about how contemporary design approaches or new technologies improve the parking experience.

John F. Kennedy famously said that a high tide lifts all boats. When organizations pursue strategic PR programs they don't just promote their brands or organizations (though they certainly do that). They also foster a better understanding of the industry. 

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As for the anxiety and anger, these emotions, too, harken back years—even decades—before the art of parking planning fully evolved and well before the advent of parking technology. The fact of the matter is that parking is more driver-friendly, convenient, and easy than ever before, but the public just doesn't know it. Unfortunately, when it comes to public perception, most people are living in the past.

So, who's to blame for these widespread misconceptions? Certainly the media bears its share of the blame. All too often, media coverage of parking issues tends to be sensationalized and overly negative. As the *Parking Matters* program has worked to make progress,

made. Parking organizations often take a reactive approach to communication, responding to particular complaints and challenges rather than aggressively touting their products and services.

Parking organizations should be particularly aggressive when it comes to using public relations to spread the good word about parking. As I've pointed out in past columns, PR, particularly publicity, is the best way to reach large numbers of people. Articles in local and national media and industry press can allow organizations to reach thousands of people all at once. A continuous strategic public relations strategy can potentially reach millions of people in the course of a year.



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