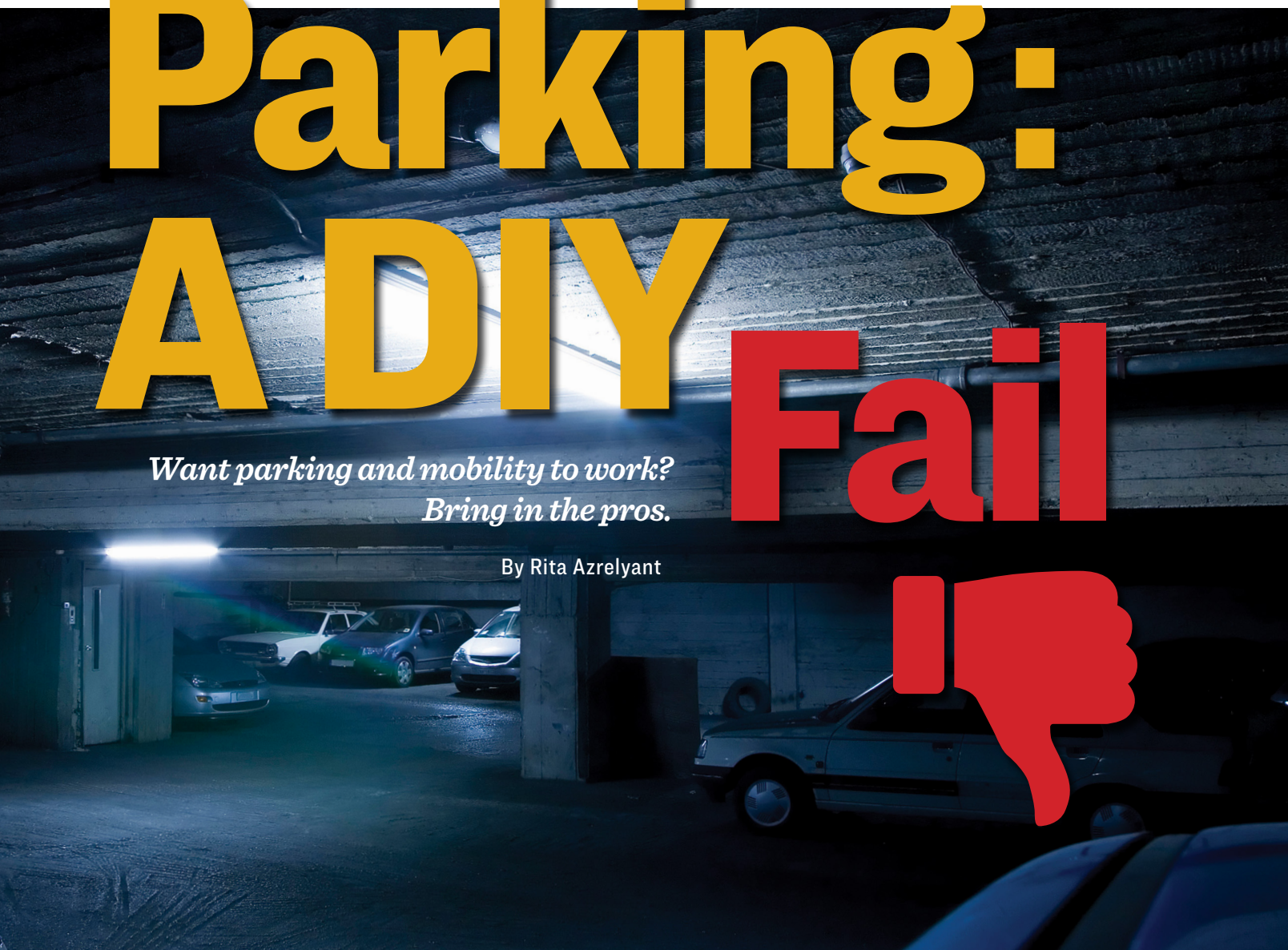
# Parking: A DIY Fail

*Want parking and mobility to work? Bring in the pros.*

By Rita Azrelyant



**I LOVE DO-IT-YOURSELF (DIY) PROJECTS.** I see so many fabulous posts on Etsy, Pinterest, and Instagram of handcrafted jewelry, artisan cakes, and animal-inspired bento lunch boxes, and I think to myself, "I can do that! How hard can it be?" Well, it's pretty hard because my inspirations never come close to what they are supposed to look like on the 'gram. There is a reason there are websites and blogs dedicated to DIY fails—and what spectacular fails they are.

Luckily for me, my DIY projects are small and inexpensive so after a couple of tries, I accept defeat and move on. DIYs are meant to be small and inexpensive, so when I see municipalities attempting to do a DIY parking project, I just shake my head and hope their DIY comes out exactly as they envision it. The reality is that it never does.

I often hear, "How hard can it be to facilitate the installation of a parking meter or a pay-by-phone setup? The company does all the hard work—do I really need a parking expert to hold my hand? It's just parking. How hard can it be?" Famous last words from municipalities that attempted to DIY parking and either experienced a failure to launch or a complete crash and burn. Yes, to a layperson, the concept of parking may seem pretty simple, but the technical intricacies of today's parking industry are far more complex than what they were five, 10, or 15 years ago.

## It's Complicated

Years ago, the parking industry was simple. Municipalities and organizations had their choice of either single coin-operated meters, single coin-operated meters with reloadable keys or smartcards, or pay stations that accepted credit cards, cash, and coins. You didn't need to hire an expert to provide you with logistics or explain

the technical nature of single coin-operated meters or a multi-space machine. The meters didn't talk to each other, and there was no pushing or pulling data from one system to another. The only problem was that these meters were costly and cost-prohibitive for some municipalities and organizations. As the industry grew, parking became more progressive and accessible to more organizations but, at the same time, more complex.

Sophisticated, cost-efficient, and innovative equals cost-effective and complex. The industry experienced a shift from a tangible, industrial product to an automated and technical concept. Software engineers, not builders and welders, are the ones working on improving the industry to be faster and smarter. Parking is no longer "basic." Therefore, it is not as accessible to the layperson as it was before.

As a result of the shift in the parking industry, there was now a demand and a higher level of expectations from people within the parking industry to adhere to and earn/maintain parking certifications, standards, recognitions, etc. Thus, the need for role of a parking expert with parking certifications and experience to bridge the gap between the industry and outsiders, such as municipalities, universities, nonprofit organizations, hospitals, etc.

Parking is not one size fits all—what works best in one municipality may not work in another. Parking experts, or consultants, have years of experience and parking proficiency that is indispensible in creating and developing a parking vision. For example, a municipality may be wowed by the concept of pay-by-phone and go out and solicit pay-by-phone vendors. Their desire to minimize costs by DIY will end up being costly and counterproductive because they are only focusing on a single entity—pay-by-phone—without analyzing how pay-by-phone plays into the bigger picture of the parking operation.

Consider this: A municipality currently has on-street single coin-operated meters and would like to automate but after extensive research and talking to vendors individually, determined it cannot afford to upgrade. The only solution to appease residents and merchants is to implement pay-by-phone. The city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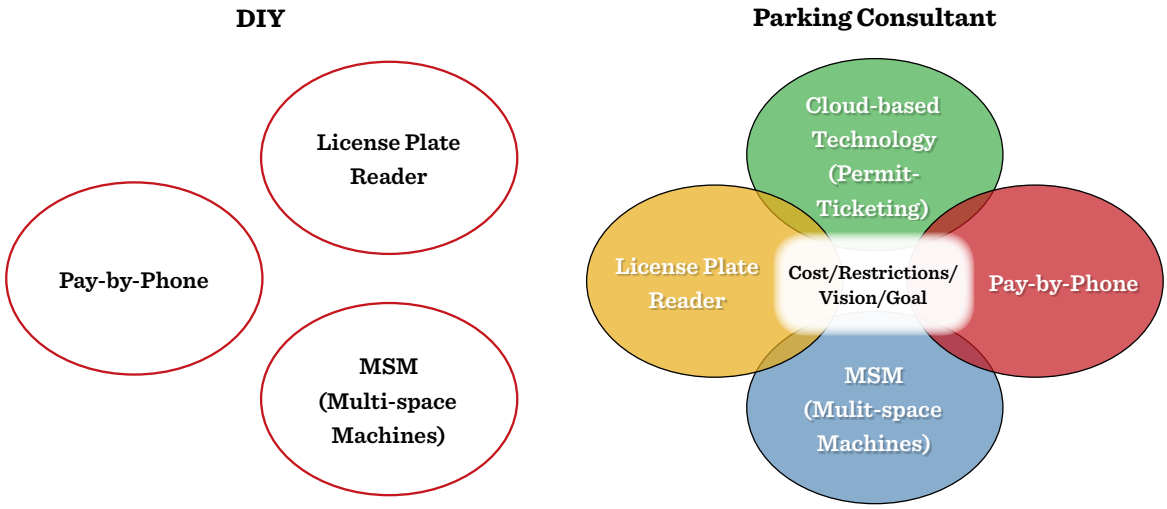


decides to implement pay-by-phone by placing stickers on all of the single meters.

The municipality has to implement multiple pay-by-phone zones; install signs and make sure they are transparent without creating sign pollution; and implement Wi-Fi enforcement. If the municipality does not already use Wi-Fi-enabled, hand-held ticket writing machines, it will have to upgrade the whole operation to do so. There are only three ways to access pay-by-phone data: going to a multi-space machine and printing out a stall report, using license plate readers, or using Wi-Fi-enabled handhelds. Parking enforcement personnel would have to work twice as hard to check single meters as well as their handhelds for pay-by-phone payments, resulting in twice the work and less productivity.

## Instead ...

There are countless issues cities may experience and when they do, a parking DIY fail occurs. Prior to implementing any type of parking infrastructure or cloud-based system, experts first gather details and information such as the characteristics of the residents, neighborhood, businesses, and the municipality:

- Are these individuals, patrons, and merchants willing to pay for parking?
- Is there a commercial district that would be willing to validate parking to drive more customers to their places of business?
- Is it a walking neighborhood?
- Where is the public transportation located?
- Is there an opportunity to introduce green initiatives with the modification of the current parking operation such as widening streetscapes/sidewalks by eliminating meters in favor of bicycles?

Experts carefully gather all the pieces, from current to potential future operations that may or may not influence the current vision, and weave them together. Based on previous experience, parking DIYs are often done piecemeal and are fragmented. Poor and short-sighted planning result in a lack of foresight, frustration, wasted time, and resources.

There are different types of parking experts with their own specialized areas, such as infrastructure experts, parking management experts, parking grant experts, etc. They provide guidance, offer tips, and negotiate the best deals for their clients as well as forewarn of any potential pitfalls. Parking is not a science: It is constantly shifting, and technology is always changing. A good parking consultant can envision the product as well as the demand for the product within the community. Not all solutions perceived as sexy are the right fit for everyone. Sometimes, finding the right fit may require patience or out-of-the-box thinking to put all the pieces of the puzzle together. The planning is the hardest part, and laying out the foundation for parking takes time, skill, and a parking professional.

There are no Cliff's Notes or shortcuts when it comes to fully understanding parking and its vast amount of opportunities. Cutting corners in parking by DIY only hurts your organization in the long run. A parking expert, whether a big company or a single consultant, is the best asset a municipality, university, nonprofit organization, hospital, etc., can utilize. A good consultant can negotiate and get the best deal and discuss financial alternatives such as cost and revenue share opportunities.

Don't treat parking DIY like a Bundt cake. If it scorches, you can't toss it in the garbage and start all over again. Skip the Parking DIY and get to know a trained, skilled parking professional. The small, upfront cost of a professional is worth millions at the end of the road.

**RITA AZRELYANT,** MA, CAPP, is principal consultant and owner of Laybel Consulting, LLC. She can be reached at laybelconsulting@gmail.com.