

Mobile Applications and PARCS Integrations Best Practices

By Todd Tucker

UBER, LYFT, Groupon, and other popular convenience applications have created an expectation of a frictionless experience for consumers. Parking consumers are no different. Many of the most popular mobile parking applications help seamlessly connect parkers with spots at their intended destinations. However, the lack of a fully integrated system with scanning capability creates a breakdown for the consumer. For the parking operator or asset owner, frustration can also exist in the absence of proper equipment integration, creating the need for more facility labor, administration, and accounting function to support the mobile sales process.

An open application programming interface, also known as a public API, allows the owner of a network-accessible service to give universal access to consumers of that service, such as developers. Open APIs are commonplace in today's connected parking ecosystem; yet in many cases, integrations seem to take extended periods of time or can feel impossible. The parking operator or asset owner is now faced with manually processing transactions, which maintains the friction that many operators and parkers are determined to avoid. So if the demand is there

from both consumer and operator, why is the complete integration process challenging?

Fragmentation

In many cases, the lingering challenge of fragmentation in the parking industry is to blame. Varying challenges in connectivity due to location and facility structure or local support by either the equipment vendor or the mobile platform could be an issue. In other scenarios, parties may have an expectation of beyond-reasonable fees to enable the integration,

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going well beyond covering development costs. Or it's simply a matter of prioritization by one or both parties.

What is a proper timing expectation for you as an asset owner/operator for integrating with your preferred application(s)? Assuming you have the hardware already in place, scanners and related equipment are ready, and both the application and the parking access and revenue control systems (PARCS) provider are motivated, an integration should take approximately two to three weeks for firms with ready-made APIs. If hardware needs to be procured and added, the time expectation goes up, assuming the budget permits for the capital outlay. If an API doesn't exist with one or both of the firms, expect major delays. So the key is to know what you're getting into with your chosen PARCS system and desired mobile platforms ahead of time. Here are some best practices to consider to help get you across the finish line faster:

- Before investing in a particular product, ensure that the platform provides for simple, easy, and seamless integrations with your favorite platforms. This means going beyond just reading the sales collateral. Many horror stories tell of promises made that are never delivered upon. Several top companies have embraced the mobile future and have truly simple processes in place to enable the integration with their product designed to integrate out of the box and forever. Find them.
- Call references and test equipment independently where possible. Validate the claims by consulting current equipment

owner references, and find some with a similar operational layout as what you're contemplating.

- Ask the PARCS vendor to quantify the number of live site integrations they have with your desired platform, then validate those claims yourself.
- Ask the equipment vendor to clearly and succinctly share its integrations process in a step-by-step manner. Many times, it's unclear what the path to activation is.
- Parking consultants can provide great insight into who is successfully fulfilling demand in the marketplace and who is struggling to meet the demands of the mobile economy.
- As with anything, prioritization is often a challenge. Today's higher performing mobile/app parking solution companies will employ full-time personnel to manage the activation process for your parking facility. Ask them to project manage and connect the dots for you if the process is dragging on.

All PARCS are not created equal in respect to swift and efficient integrations with the top mobile solutions. Expanded due diligence and accountability measures for your partners will ensure that your end result matches your parkers' expectations. Happy frictionless parking! 



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