

# The Customer's Voice Matters, Now More than Ever

By [Andrew Sachs, CAPP](#)

**I**N A WORLD RUN BY ONLINE SEARCHES, the customer's story is more powerful than ever. Parking marketing has evolved in recent years. As always, operations need to communicate that they offer convenient and accessible parking with desirable amenities. But the old-school methods are no longer effective for pushing messages. Today, effective parking marketing begins with great customer service leading to a positive presence online.

## Targeting the Customer

In 2019, about 80 percent of transient parkers found [Harbor Park Garage](#), the Baltimore garage I manage, through a digital search. By comparison, 12 percent found the garage by driving past or just knowing our location, and 8 percent of transient traffic came from aggregators (like SpotHero and Park Whiz, both of which are important Harbor Park partners).

As the most dominant digital search tool—and the owner of Waze—Google is a key gatekeeper; most transient customers are likely to find a garage using the company's technology. As such, we have to pay attention to what Google values.

## Google's New Approach

While Google's effect on information sharing is nothing new, recent changes to its information management and delivery have a significant impact the parking industry.

The search algorithm prioritizes reviews in [Google My Business](#), the company's free tool driving local searches and maps. The algorithm is frequently updated to prioritize local businesses with high scores in customer interaction and ranking. As a result, companies with few or negative rankings and those that do not engage with customers online have lower visibility overall.

## And Parking

Google's new approach makes quality of service critical for all businesses; reliance on Google as a driver of traffic means it's especially key for the parking industry. It is easy for an angry customer to submit reviews online, where they live forever.

Consider this scenario: a transient parker posts a complaint about being stuck at your gate and not receiving a speedy response even after pressing the call button. The following week, an office manager looking for 200 monthly spaces sees that review and, as a result, does not consider your parking facility.

The most effective way to avoid a scenario like this one is to prioritize customer service, making it part of your company culture.

First, understand customers by walking in their shoes—literally. Walk the garage, use the elevators, drive out of the gated exit, and use the call button to make sure parkers' garage experiences are as positive as possible and to identify opportunities to go above and beyond with advice or services.



Even in the best garages, mistakes happen. Empower your staff to fix mistakes immediately, doing what it takes to make sure customers leave happy.

Someone might still post a negative review. If that happens, don't ignore it. Respond to the review and make sure you are accessible—via messaging, social media, and other channels—to keep the lines of communication open.

Ultimately, those positive actions and messages will all work in your favor. ♦



**ANDREW SACHS, CAPP, MFA**, is president of Gateway Parking Services. He can be reached at [andrew@gpsparking.com](mailto:andrew@gpsparking.com).