

# Parking's Future Isn't Remote After All

By Kevin Uhlenhaker

**T**HE COMING AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE AGE is already shaking up the parking industry, even though it may not arrive for a few more years. Pundits across the industry—and many more with no connection to parking whatsoever—are warning that autonomous vehicles will decimate parking demand. They warn that, in the future, riders will be dropped off at their destinations by self-driving ride-share services or autonomous vehicles that will return home or to less-costly remote parking facilities outside the city center. The conventional wisdom, at least among these “experts,” is that parking demand will diminish so dramatically that parking owners won’t need to replace their parking facilities when they are no longer functional; nor will they need to plan to develop new parking assets in the future.

Needless to say, this line of reasoning has many in the parking industry nervous—and not just owners wondering how to plan for this ominous future. Many operators, equipment providers, and parking designers are concerned that there may not be as much demand for their products and services in the not-too-distant-future.

## The Whole Reality

This conventional wisdom ignores human nature. In this technology age, we want instant gratification. We don’t have time to drive to a video store; we want streaming movies we can instantly access. We are too busy to go to the mall; we go to Amazon to instantly find the products we want to purchase. In some cities, Amazon even offers two-hour delivery because their customers expect, and are willing to pay for, the convenience of (almost) instant gratification.

Is it realistic then to think that we’ll shed our impatience and be willing to wait 45 minutes, an hour, or perhaps longer for our cars to return to pick us up after a long day at work, an unexpected doctor appointment, or a day of shopping or night out on the town? Of course not. We want to be able to quickly get to our vehicles when we are ready to go

home or when we have somewhere to go. Plus, even if we do have superhuman patience, most of us don’t have that type of flexibility in our day-to-day schedules.

Sure, parking demand will change in time, but that doesn’t necessarily

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mean parking owners should start scaling back on their assets. Instead, they should be looking for new ways to manage their parking. Parkers of the future will be more focused on customer service, expecting the most convenient parking experience possible. They may be paying a premium for parking, rather than relying on ride-sharing services or sending their autonomous vehicles away to cheaper parking options, and they will expect a premium experience. The key will be for owners and operators to fully embrace technology.

Many owners and operators think that they already embrace technology, but most fall far short. Some select tools that meet just today’s needs, without antic-

ipating future challenges. Some fail to keep up with the rapid change in parking technology, choosing tools that are practically obsolete by the time they are fully operational. And many fall prey to the most common technology procurement mistake: choosing the cheapest solution out of the box without considering installation costs, the product’s history of reliability, or its future scalability and customizability.

Today’s parking technology is constantly evolving and improving, and owners and their operators need to keep up-to-date on the latest tools and be willing to implement them in a timely fashion. They will also need to be willing to adopt new technology as the land-

scape changes. Don’t avoid the latest parking management tools because you just installed their predecessor; figure out how the new tools can integrate into your existing suite.

By fully embracing technology and putting it to work to improve both the customer experience and parking management, owners and operators can navigate the age of the AV. In fact, they won’t just survive—they’ll thrive. 



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