

The University of Toledo

Creating a better parking experience on campus with daily decision parking options

Background

With over 250 academic programs and a focus on innovation, The University of Toledo in Ohio is a highly regarded public research university. The school has both an academic and scientific campus and over 16,000 students in attendance. There are also a number of public facilities, including a large training hospital, a rec center, and others. On any given day, there's a wide mix of students, staff, training professionals, hospital patients, visitors, and other patrons on campus.

"One of our main issues was compliance. All of our clientele have very different reasons for why or when they're on campus," explains Sherri Kaspar, Director of Parking and Transportation. The University of Toledo campus has nearly 15,000 parking spaces, including three metered visitor lots, and around 50 surface lots historically used for permit parking only.

A better experience with flexible, daily decision options

The University of Toledo is a proactive adopter of new strategies and best-in-class technologies. They recognized right away that mobile payment would help improve the parking experience on campus by giving customers more choices. "Mobile is where everything's headed. Everyone's life is right there in that cell phone, so we wanted to give everyone the options right in their hand instead of having to come in and spend more time figuring out parking," Kaspar says.

The flexibility of mobile payment also prompted the university to consider how it could be used to increase compliance and make better use of their parking inventory. Since mobile apps don't require investment in new hardware and integrate into existing parking systems, it opened up opportunities to offer daily decision parking alongside traditional long-term permits. "We really liked that we could turn almost every space in our lots into a parking meter," notes Kaspar, reflecting on their decision to expand short-term parking options into the permit lots.



University of Toledo by the numbers

 **7,900+**
Parking spaces

 **40%**
Adoption in metered areas

 **25%**
Daily permit adoption

Evaluating mobile vendors: best-in-breed vs. All-in-one

When evaluating a mobile payment vendor, finding a user-friendly solution that would also integrate with their existing systems was a high priority. But Dexter Emch, Operations Administrator, recalls that at the end of the day it was vital to find an app people wanted to use, not just one that worked.

“We try to know every single population that comes to campus – it’s really diverse – so having more options is incredibly helpful.”

Sherri Kaspar

Director of Parking & Transportation

The team evaluated several options, including an app provided by the campus’ existing online permitting and enforcement vendor. The focus on apps with a great user experience led them to ParkMobile, which was already being used by the City of Toledo. “Using an app that people are already familiar with in the city allows students to travel from downtown to campus without having to download yet another app,” Emch says. The positive feedback from the city encouraged them to reach out to other universities who were already using ParkMobile. In particular, they were eager to understand how the app works together with their existing enforcement and LPR systems. “The other universities had nothing but good things to say,” Kaspar recalls. “It also helped us understand the implementation process from people who had already gone through it.”

Based on the popularity of ParkMobile in the area, and the stellar feedback from other universities using ParkMobile, the University of Toledo decided on a best-in-breed approach, implementing ParkMobile in the Fall of 2019.

A positive reception from all types of drivers

The reaction to ParkMobile on campus was overwhelmingly positive, leading the university to make the app available campus wide. Kaspar believes that offering daily decision parking alongside long-term has improved the overall parking experience. “The more options we can give our customers, the better. It lets us design parking to be per person instead of trying to put everyone in one bucket,” she says. Daily decision parking choices are especially popular among students, who often lack the finances for long-term parking or are not on campus enough to warrant it. “It gives them an option to see if it’s better to pay by the hour or pay for the entire semester,” Emch notes.

For short-term visitors, ParkMobile provided an easier, more convenient way to pay. ParkMobile’s non-app payment options, such as payment via phone call, also made it an accessible choice for older, less tech-savvy users or users without smartphones. ParkMobile’s user-friendly solution also helped cut down on confusion and increase compliance. Department-specific signage lets visitors know exactly how to pay for parking directly from their phone.

ParkMobile remains popular on campus and adoption is steadily growing. Offering daily decision parking in lots that were previously permit-only opened up new revenue streams. Even with decreased traffic on campus from the global pandemic, ParkMobile’s adoption in long-term lots is up to 25%. In metered lots, ParkMobile makes up 40% of transactions.

Exceptional support and service

Kaspar and Emch go out of their way to praise the responsive support team at ParkMobile. “Out of all the companies that we work with, ParkMobile has by far the best customer service group,” Kaspar says. In addition to their exceptional technical support, ParkMobile also received high marks for providing effective signage and customized marketing material, making a big transition seamless and easy for every one of their customers.

For Kaspar and Emch, ParkMobile has proven itself as a valuable, long-term technology partner of the university. “A lot of times with a company, they’ll be responsive during the implementation process, but then you get pushed to the side. With ParkMobile, there’s been no drop off in our customer service at all,” Emch says.