Where Shall I Park?

A Tale of Two Cities

By Todd Pierce

Orange EasyPark sign.

Why do people park downtown?

People don't visit downtown just to park, do they? They go downtown to work, attend a business function, shop, dine, or see a movie. Whatever the reason, people sure don't venture downtown simply to park.

Why should someone park at your garage?

After all, a garage is a garage is a garage—right? Folks want to park in the most convenient location for the least amount of money. And the garage must also be clean and safe. This is all people really want from a parking facility.

Where shall I park?
A driver's eye view.

With such a large parking selection downtown, how do I choose? There must be 10 signs up and down the street. Over there, I see a huge sign with stacked letters reading, "P A R K H E R E." To my right there are three signs reading, "Public Parking," and, further up the road, I see a blue "P" and a green "P." Geez—these garages all look alike! How am I supposed to choose when I can't even see the rates from the street? I'll choose this one.

Oh great, cars are backed up behind me now, impatiently waiting as I attempt to decode the rates and perform some quick math calculations. Hmm, let's see:

> *$3/per hour, or portion of.*
>
> *$12/day max.*
>
> *$9/early bird special.*
>
> *$6.50/eve max.*
>
> *$9/all day Saturday and Sunday, except event parking.*
>
> *$15/event parking.*

Yikes!

Wait a minute—what is the garage's hours of operation? Will it close before 10:00pm? That's when my movie ends. Does the theatre validate parking? Is this place even clean and safe?

Forget it, I think a space just opened up on the street ahead. Oh, for crying out loud, that guy cut me off and took my space. Now I have to find another "P"!

Everyone knows where to park in Portland.

The above scenario doesn't happen in downtown Portland, where *SmartPark* garages are conveniently sprinkled throughout the downtown core. *SmartPark* parking

Highly visible, easy-to-understand parking rates.

is also clearly advertised: One ad on the back of a bus reads, "Park Smartly! We have lots and lots of S PA C ES." In addition, there are large, strategically placed *SmartPark* signs that can be read from a block away that simply and clearly state, "95¢ Per Hour."

Convenient locations; visible, easy-to-understand parking rates; a logo; and a familiar color scheme—black, red, and white, just like the NBA Portland Trailblazers—it's no wonder that the city's Portland Public Parking, now *SmartPark*, attained an incredible 22% increase in annual parking revenue within one year following the launch of the new brand in 1993. Over a 10-year stretch, revenues continued to grow by an average of 7.5% per year—*without a rate increase.*

In Portland, a brand was built, and brand loyalty was both immediate and long-lasting!

SmartPark billboard advertisement.

In Vancouver, parking is *'Easy.'*

At any given moment during a weekday in downtown Vancouver, BC, 52% of all cars in the downtown core are searching for parking. If you want to find transient parking in downtown Vancouver, you simply have to look for the orange "P." Why orange? Among a sea of red, blue, yellow, and green signs, the Parking Corporation of Vancouver searched for a color that would stand out. Not only has no other parking operator used orange in its signage, finding any storefront sign in orange was, and is, a rarity. Selecting a unique color was an "easy" decision, as was the new name— *EasyPark*. Like Portland, one can see *EasyPark*'s rates a block away: "$1.00 Per Hour, *first two hours*."

Brand-building tips from two cities: *It's all in the name.*

Name. Pick a name that is easy to say. After all, we say a brand name more often than we see a brand name.

Year 1993: "Portland Public Parking" became – *SmartPark*.

Year 2001: "Parking Corporation of Vancouver" became – *EasyPark*.

Color. Pick a unique color scheme. In Portland, *SmartPark* selected black and red, with white, in large part because of the city's affinity with the local Trailblazers' professional basketball team. Searching for a unique color to stand out within the urban environment of Vancouver, *EasyPark* selected orange, complemented with white and gray.

Simplify your parking rates. Both Portland and Vancouver conducted in-depth surveys of downtown transient parkers and learned that:

1. The average length of stay of a transient parker is two hours.

2. Parking patrons want to know what they'll pay for these first two hours.

Therefore, clearly display your rate for the first two hours. Signage should be easy to read from at least half a block away and placed in a consistent location at each of your sites. Build the perception that your facilities are the least expensive place to park downtown.

Promote through partnerships. Although *SmartPark* invested in billboard and bus advertising campaigns over the years, cross-promotion efforts with the Portland Business Alliance have paid the greatest dividends. *EasyPark* currently has partnership initiatives with Tourism Vancouver, the local Business Improvement Alliances, the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, and the Vancouver Police Department. In addition, *EasyPark* sponsors the local Jazz Festival, New Year's Eve events, and the like. The company is now working to support Go-Green initiatives, offering a 50% parking discount for fuel-efficient vehicles and expanding its discount programs for motorcycle, bicycle, and carpool customers.

EasyPark surface parking lot sign.

A Tale of Two Cities:
Testimonials.

SmartPark Manager, Casey Jones: "Creating the *SmartPark* identity was one of the best business decisions the City of Portland has ever made regarding its public parking operations."

Mel McKinney, General Manager, *EasyPark* - Vancouver: "By creating a brand identity, we not only gained instant recognition, we gained site recognition. Before this, people had no idea we operated over 40 downtown locations. Moreover, we created an atmosphere within Vancouver that gives real meaning to our *EasyPark* mission statement: *To operate safe, friendly, and convenient parking that supports the economic vitality of our community.* This mission statement has been in place since the Parking Corporation of Vancouver was founded in 1948."

So, why do people park downtown? *Because they have to.* It just so happens that, in Portland, you can park *Smart.* And, in Vancouver, you can park *Easy!* Ⓟ

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