



Boost retail growth and delight site users with ANPR

How the humble car park is helping transform retail sites across the UK

Finding the gold in your car park

Whilst research from the Office for National Statistics[^] shows that more money is still spent in store compared with online, retailers cannot escape the fact that 'virtual shopping' is growing at a much faster yearly rate (15%) which is placing increasing pressure on 'bricks and mortar' shops to compete. While physical store sales have hovered in the region of £300bn, year-on-year levels have remained relatively flat since 2014. Online sales, meanwhile, continue to show a healthy increase, growing by 15.9% from 2016 to 2017 alone. One thing's for certain - as consumers continue to opt for the convenience of online shopping, physical stores aren't the go-to they once were.

When considered alongside new research from the British Parking Association (BPA) which found that customers rack up nearly four days a year – that's 91 hours – trying to park at a store*, it's never been more important to deliver the most positive parking experience possible. Not only does the car park form both the first and last impression of your site experience but moreover, its successful management is key to enabling both managing agents and their tenants to thrive in highly competitive markets.



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Let's take a closer look at the factors impacting footfall, how retail agents like you can make improvements and ways in which your car park could help transform physical store sales to give online a serious run for its money.

New technology and big data are unlocking a range of opportunities to optimise capacity, encourage healthy space turnover and create new margin-rich revenue streams to stimulate further growth across sites of all sizes - from town centre hubs and independent traders to retail parks and superstores.

Spotting the symptoms of a poor performing site

If your role is to provide a smooth-flowing site, where motorists can expect a positive parking experience and tenants benefit from the best shopper turnover, an inefficient car park is going to hurt everyone concerned. Complaints and mounting admin can really eat into your valuable time, alongside mounting pressure from senior management to lift revenues – so let's start there.

Often a product of limited space capacity, non-genuine customers using the facilities or even a layout that's no longer fit-for-purpose, poorly optimised sites can really hurt your tenants' bottom-line and site reputation. The frustration experienced by genuine customers is equal only to the dismay felt by the business at large, who are losing custom as a result of this domino effect. If you're one of these businesses feeling the pain or the managing agent responsible for providing what should be a thriving site, you're not alone.

An ineffective site layout will undoubtedly attract poor parking practices. From cars straddling two bays due to faded lining or complaints from blue badge holders suffering from poor space allocation or ramp provision, these issues can seriously impact repeat visitor levels. The BPA research highlights a whopping 59% of respondents who noted that poor parking and people taking up more than one space as reasons not to venture to the shops*. Concerns about security might also drive visitor peaks during daylight hours followed by a harsh drop-off once the sun goes down, even though the stores may remain open long into the night.

In situations where the site is being abused, customers are often forced to go elsewhere – to a competitor maybe or online ironically. Either way, physical till revenues suffer as a result. Tangible symptoms can be sites where tenants can clearly see people taking a space before visiting a nearby location instead – a town centre, train station or hospital maybe. A tip for spotting people misusing your premises is to look for cars parked around the outer edges of your site as these could very well belong to motorists not actually using your facilities – certainly that's our experience.

Some sites in your scheme may exhibit high congestion – temperamental barriers which demand constant attention could be a factor. Also, the sheer volume of traffic moving through a single entry/exit point might be causing a queue to form on exit, as shoppers negotiate inserting their ticket the right way up so the barrier will rise. Whatever the reason, alongside being a nuisance for shoppers, congestion can hugely affect space turnover rates – the difference between welcoming 5 cars across the day compared to say 7. Each space on your site will directly correlate to revenue through your tenants' tills. Fact. So, imagine the impact if each space is taken up for an additional 15 minutes due to searching for a way to pay for parking, waiting in a queue at the barrier or worst of all preventing new shoppers entering site. In particular, retail sites with fast food outlets rely heavily on smooth flow and quicker space visitor turnover to drive sales levels.



Besides the shocking figures relating to time spent trying to park, the BPA findings also highlighted that 40% of motorists find parking a stressful experience*.

Symptoms such as these certainly affirm the BPA's findings about shopper frustration, but a host of new technology can transform the way your estate operates to improve footfall, site efficiencies and bottom-line revenue. Win, win.

Untapped opportunity

There are a host of new technologies emerging which can transform the way your car park operates to help both you as the managing agent, and your tenants thrive – and it's all enabled by rich data.

ANPR technology has been used to control abuse for a number of years very effectively. It acts as a deterrent to those motorists taking up valuable space which in turn frees up capacity for genuine customers. This means they're no longer forced to shop elsewhere and eradicates the pain previously felt by site operators like you who may spend significant time and effort handling tenant complaints and site congestion.

However, a by-product of ANPR hardware is rich data and lots of it. ParkingEye themselves generate a staggering 4 million pieces of data every single day and it's this data which can be your secret weapon against the growing threat to retail from online.

By using this data creatively, sites can not only turn parking into a positive experience but generate significant economic opportunity to boot. Of course, a better experience in itself will encourage more footfall and repeat visits but there's so much more in ANPR data to exploit...

Invisible parking

The ability of ANPR data to enable an entirely seamless, free-flow experience for your tenants' customers is something which the BPA have impressed upon operators for years in their drive to raise quality standards. Get this right and shoppers will virtually float in and out of your site, leaving feeling delighted with their purchases rather than grumpy and frustrated by painful parking – encouraging optimum space turnover and maximum footfall with zero hassle.

Whilst physical entry barriers can serve a purpose, they rarely help the layout and throughflow of a car park. Investing in ANPR technology can help you remove the need for barriers altogether, providing a better user experience, whilst ensuring nobody leaves the car park without paying if you offer paid parking. For instances where barriers must be retained, ANPR can be fully integrated so it automates the rise and fall of the arm seamlessly – the best of both worlds some might say.

When linked with payment data, shoppers can drive onto site, find a spot and get shopping without any need for barriers – the cameras track all vehicles on your site 24/7 so when ready to leave, the motorist simply finds a kiosk to make payment. ANPR integrated kiosks use the data they're being fed to recognise who's on site so the customer can select their vehicle details on the 19" touchscreen and pay using card or cash (coins and/or notes with the bonus of giving change). In a nanosecond, the kiosk then tells the camera they've paid. What's more, by asking the motorist to double-check their vehicle details, the site can ensure both the highest payment rate for the landowner and provide a fair way to prevent motorist contraventions.



Analysis across our own payment estate shows an almost equal split between card and cash payments. However, deeper analysis of newer installations shows a much higher swing towards cashless solutions with some retail sites recording a startling 83% of users now opting for card.

Though interesting, it's worth noting that as our society makes the gradual transition to cashless, less tech-savvy visitors must still be considered. Imagine the difficulties, and concerns certain visitors face in making a virtual payment, or those people without a mobile phone or even a bank account for that matter.

Our advice – always give the customer choice.



Creating a margin-rich parking estate for retail 5

Staying with payments made on-foot, these can be particularly difficult for 1m+ disabled motorists in the UK. Your estate may already support virtual payments but if not, on-site machines ought to be reviewed with disabled customers in mind. Ideally, your hardware should be given the seal of approval by the UK Disabled Motoring Association, as is the case with our Glyde Kiosks.

If your tenants already provide 'click & collect' services, ensure ample space is provided for those 'nipping in and out' so it doesn't become another site congestion contributor. Indeed, if you feel the site can support it, these kinds of services present significant opportunity for your tenants, especially in light of recent research by managing agent giant Savills which has found that 'click & collect' shoppers spend 37% more in-store.

Going further, when integrated with cloud-based payment software, not only does the driver not have to worry about cash but there's no need to think about paying full stop. Instead, cameras capture in/out times and automatically deduct payment on exit, with an SMS delivered to registered motorists detailing the sum paid. The ultimate 'free-flow' solution, this technology makes the car park element virtually invisible within the overall retail experience, with the ability to lift repeat shopper rates by 15%+ due to its unrivalled convenience.



Your bottom line

Going further still, solutions which integrate ANPR data with online pre-booking websites drive those searching online into physical tenant stores across your estate. Technology such as Glyde Spaces uses accurate occupancy data at a site-level to determine unused bays, by hour/day/week/month. Negating the need for pay-on-foot altogether is perfect for disabled customers, the software logs this spare capacity and promotes it to motorists searching for available parking nearby. Just like auto-pay services, shoppers can simply drive onto site, find a spot and get shopping. Simple.

Not only does this create a potentially significant margin-rich revenue stream for landowners and managing agents, but potentially fills the car park with new audiences who may otherwise have shopped elsewhere, creating additional footfall for your tenants. Certainly, a great way to outsmart the competition and with some sites generating up to £10,000 in additional parking revenue, one not to be overlooked. Everybody wins too - motorists, tenants and managing agents & operators – all from often disregarded ANPR data.

ANPR linked loyalty apps can also lift site revenues. The camera logs registered users on entry and serves live offers to their phone. For instance, let's take a large retail site housing both a Costa and a Starbucks but one is offering a free 'tall drink' with every sandwich... you get the idea. Flexible enough to roll-out to those tenants who've opted in or site/estate-wide, this low-admin, in many cases free service is helping site operators win back trade from both the online world and competitor sites nearby.

Services such as these can also optimise space turnover, with time spent by the previous motorist making payment on foot now available to the next shopper.

If your site isn't charging for parking, you could consider a maximum free stay instead. This both encourages shoppers to visit but keeps space turnover ticking over nicely to optimise footfall for your tenants.



Layout improvements

Quoting the BPA research once more, when respondents were able to access parking spaces, the layout and design were thought to be a headache. Over a quarter found their local car parks a problem to navigate, while the lack of visible pay-and-display machines irritated 17%. Ease of access was also a sore point for 51%, while a lack of bright lighting put 44% of people off – an issue of safety and security that's perhaps not too surprising for anyone who worries about leaving their car unattended.

Let's assume that misuse has been eradicated and that each vehicle arriving on site is a genuine customer looking to spend money with your tenants. If you're witnessing poor parking behaviours, dealing with mounting complaints and trouble with capacity, the layout may well be a contributing factor. The first place the start is to fully review bay organisation – locations, space between bays and provision for distinct 'groups' - parent and child bays, disabled motorists and staff all need consideration to ensure appropriate parking is both maximised and available to serve customers. Good, clear lining is key once you've got a plan to help customers park responsibly and clear signage about parking rules will generally make life easier for motorists and managing agents alike.

Don't forget about the visual appeal of your site, too. Poorly laid out sites can force parking to spill onto surrounding routes which may not be as secure or safe if it's on a busy road. Assess the car park lighting is sufficient, not just for better pedestrian safety but also accessibility – a well-lit site will encourage people to visit after it gets dark. If you have sites within your estate which see footfall take a nosedive over the winter months, this could indicate security concerns. If you wish to reassure customers, why not go further still and obtain ParkMark accreditation. This BPA and police-managed award recognises excellent levels of safety and security in car parks – useful in assuring shoppers that both them and their vehicle will be in safe hands. This in turn should increase visitor levels outside daylight hours.



Understanding on-site behaviours

There's a huge opportunity for retailers to repurpose accurate ANPR data – overlooked by many – for commercial gain. Working alongside one of the UK's largest supermarkets, the ANPR data we capture has been creatively utilised to drive business decisions, challenge or confirm assumptions and lift incremental revenue. Our cameras generate 1.5 billion data points each year – data bespoke to your site (s) which can be used to seriously monetise your car park, so much so the lowly car park is now seen as an attractive alternative investment in its own right.

Taken in isolation, as individual elements, the data is nothing new – but overlaid together with wider datasets (POS takings for instance), ANPR can enrich the 'bricks n' mortar' experience amidst aggressive online growth. Using data groups such as visitor counts, duration, occupancy, payment choice and repeat visitor rates (loyalty) it has helped this giant retailer make significant commercial decisions, such as opening a petrol filling station on site or partnering with fast food retailers.

As specialists in retail, supporting over 600 clients operating thousands of sites, our ANPR estate is 5 times larger than the nearest competitor giving you unrivalled access to sector-specific knowledge – as well as rich, real-time data. This is key in that, not only can our in-house data analyst team advise on further efficiencies as part of a continual site improvement plan but can present further opportunities, such as how to fill unoccupied space across your estate.

Using the Microsoft SQL stack for storage and fully compliant with GDPR, ANPR reports can cover tariff breakdowns, revenue reports, frequency, peak periods and average durations - used by some retailers to determine opening times, promotional activity and support planning. Especially useful is our aggregated performance comparator, both within a single sector and across industries, to provide valuable benchmarks but also sell a compelling story to potential tenants looking to put down roots on a high performing site.



The final word

In the digital age, retail sites must look to complement their online counterparts and vice versa to provide convenience and value to shoppers, in order to drive sales across the wider omnichannel strategy. The car park is key in making life easier for those using the site and in doing so, encouraging longer durations, more throughput and repeat visits.

If managing a car park is just one of your responsibilities, or a one-off task you've been asked to tackle by management, implementing the right technologies can really help. Alongside all the clever technology we've covered, one of the main benefits for busy estates and facility teams is the level of automation it can deliver to your operation – driving out cost and saving time.

Furthermore, you'll be in a strong position to demonstrate the changes you've led in the car park to senior management as ANPR technology can provide you with demonstrable KPIs such as

before/after daily vehicle counts and repeat visitor comparisons to show loyalty levels and additional revenue.

By utilising rich data to deliver a smoother, more positive parking experience, complaints will undoubtedly reduce, the site will pretty much run itself and best of all, you can demonstrate a high-throughput, optimised site to potential tenants – maybe even charging a premium for a site that really returns.

The applications of ANPR data are far-reaching yet Forbes have recently highlighted that the value of data is not being realised within the UK. Even the Government have published a paper on the economic opportunity presented by data-driven innovation and estimate that associated technologies, including those highlighted in this guide, will contribute a staggering £60billion p/year to the UK economy by 2020.

The car park. Usually the first and last touchpoint for your shoppers yet so often the most overlooked capital asset of all – could it instead be your decisive resource to drive business productivity for you, more footfall for your tenants and serious bottom-line revenue. Don't just manage, take control.

Savills statistics taken from their 'Commercial Research Retail 2018' guide, available at www.savills.co.uk

BPA research findings available at www.britishparking.co.uk

Governmental information sourced from 'Comparing "bricks and mortar" store sales with online retail sales: August 2018' report. Visit www.ons.gov.uk

The ANPR market-leader

Established in 2004 ParkingEye has grown to become the largest supplier of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems on private car parks in the UK. Our system captures over 1.5 billion vehicle recognitions annually and accounts for 40% of the market.

ParkingEye is a full turnkey supplier offering total car park management, spanning ANPR monitoring, enforcement and smart city services to provide a more positive parking experience, boost revenues and make life much easier.

Whilst other providers may offer a more standardised approach, years of experience has taught us that every site is unique so not only have we built the largest interchangeable portfolio in the market, but we tailor every single solution to suit the way you work perfectly.

The entire team at ParkingEye is committed to working in partnership with our customers and forging long-term, collaborative relationships – reflected in our 98% client retention rate. Our approach is a proactive one, from monitoring your site to analysing user behaviour so you can optimise the way you work. That's why we're managing solutions for some of the most complex car parks in the country, including 3 of Britain's top 6 supermarkets, some of the world's largest hotel chains, thousands of retailers, property management giants, NHS Trusts and some of the country's most prestigious universities.

All this, wrapped up in a market-leading service which covers remote fix, quality assurance and the capability to handle a staggering 4m pieces of data every single day... installed with minimal fuss in a matter of weeks. Your estate/scheme would be in very safe hands...



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