Parking and Cloud Hosting:
A Technology Whose Time Has Come

In just a few short years, cloud hosting has radically transformed our lives. It allows us to remotely access songs, pictures and documents—even change the temperature of our houses!

Cloud computing also makes our smartphones and tablets much more powerful (and more useful) by providing access to incredibly advanced software tools and apps.

Cloud technologies are also transforming the ways businesses operate. By offering a remote platform for storing data or accessing software and apps, the cloud provides companies:

- greater global reach
- instant access to valuable data
- the ability to share data among multiple devices
- greater security.

Cloud Advantages Can Benefit Parking

Yet, while cloud computing has quickly become the standard for many industries, the parking industry has been slower to fully embrace its promise. However, the advantages provided by the cloud are tailor-made for parking organizations because of its ability to streamline the whole parking management process.

Parking owners, and operators in particular, can become more efficient, be more responsive to customers' needs, and operate more cost-effectively by managing their operations with cloud technologies. That's because the cloud provides real-time access to vital data, permitting parking operators to respond more quickly and effectively to market forces and customer demand.

Operators and administrators can also instantly obtain information about their parkers, such as whether they are repeat users, what times of the day they typically park, and where specifically they are parking. This information permits owners and operators to make more informed decisions about parking rates and other operational matters and better manage supply-and-demand issues.

Real-Time Data Can Aid Enforcement

By providing immediate access to parker data, cloud technologies can also dramatically improve the effectiveness of enforcement efforts. Officers are now able

to use smart phones or other hand-held devices to monitor vehicles and spaces to make sure that drivers have indeed paid for the spaces in which they have parked.

In many cases, this real-time accessibility has even proven to yield more sustainable parking solutions. For instance, enforcement officers are now able to pull parking reports online, rather than printing out reports to monitor the status of parking transactions. This can also save operators thousands of dollars by reducing the need to buy paper and printing supplies for reports.

Six Reasons Why Cloud Technology Might be Right for You

Cloud technologies offer extraordinary function and flexibility. The cloud is a particularly powerful tool for parking owners and operators, keeping them on the cutting edge of the technology revolution. Here are six reasons why it might be time to take another look at cloud hosting:

1. Parking owners and operators don't need to take on the expense of maintaining an IT department or keeping an IT consultant on retainer. The cloud's administrators can handle all day-to-day administration.

2. Owners and operators have immediate access to the latest software and updates, and no longer have to wait five years or more for their technology to become obsolete before switching to new or more useful technology.

3. The cloud permits IT managers and consultants to focus on managing their organizations' services, rather than staying mired in deployment and support issues.

4. Companies can save thousands of dollars by using software provided on a remote server in a controlled environment, because savings through economies of scale are often passed along to users.

5. Cloud-based providers offer affordable access to useful applications like human resources and CRM tools that can help firms operate more efficiently and profitably.

6. The cloud's SaaS model often offers multiple plans and options to allow an organization's technology to grow with it over time; and allows technology vendors to react to changing markets and pass those changes on to parking owners and operators.

Remote Software Access Equals Big Savings

Of course, saving money by cutting the need for office supplies just represents the tip of the iceberg when it comes to saving money. The biggest—and most important—savings come from providing remote access to the latest and most useful software.

No longer do parking organizations have to buy, license, and maintain their own "install and own" systems. Rather than buying the software they need to operate, companies can rent it by utilizing "pay-as-you-go" software as a service (SaaS) platforms.

In addition to cost savings, SaaS platforms also provide regular updates as the software is improved and new features are added. No longer do companies have to wait until their software becomes obsolete or until there is money budgeted to buy a newer version of the software.

Municipalities Can Save with Mobile Payment

Cities and towns can also get in on the savings when it comes to upgrading equipment. One of the greatest capital expenditures facing the typical municipal parking department is the cost of replacing or upgrading meters. Depending on the size of the city, it can cost tens—even hundreds—of thousands of dollars to purchase and install new meters.

One of the advantages of cloud-based hosting systems is that they often support mobile payment for parking. Municipalities can avoid significant capital outlays by adding stickers to their single space "dumb" meters to convey a mobile

payment option that accepts credit and debit card payments. Today's modern mobile pay tools are extraordinarily convenient and user-friendly, and it doesn't cost private or public operators much to offer the mobile pay option.

So if operators don't pay for mobile payment, who does? Typically, operators establish a nominal "convenience fee" (usually around 35 cents) for the mobile payment option. Typically, parkers are happy to pay this fee for the convenience of paying for parking with the single push of a button on their cell phones, rather than having to search for coins to plug a meter or wait in line at a multi-space meter.

Cloud technologies represent an extraordinary advance for the parking industry, permitting parking owners and operators to operate more efficiently, effectively and cost-effectively than ever before. And because of the cloud's ability to facilitate mobile payment and social media linkage, it also permits parking organizations to provide a much more customer-friendly experience for parkers.

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It's not just mobile payment that is on the forefront of cloud-based technology. Operators around the world have yielded similar operational efficiencies in their citation management platforms, contract permits, and event management solutions. We should continue to use technology as a means to improve the parking experience.

Bob and Charlie Youakim are managing partners of Passport Parking. Bob can be reached at **robert.youakim@passport-parking.com**.