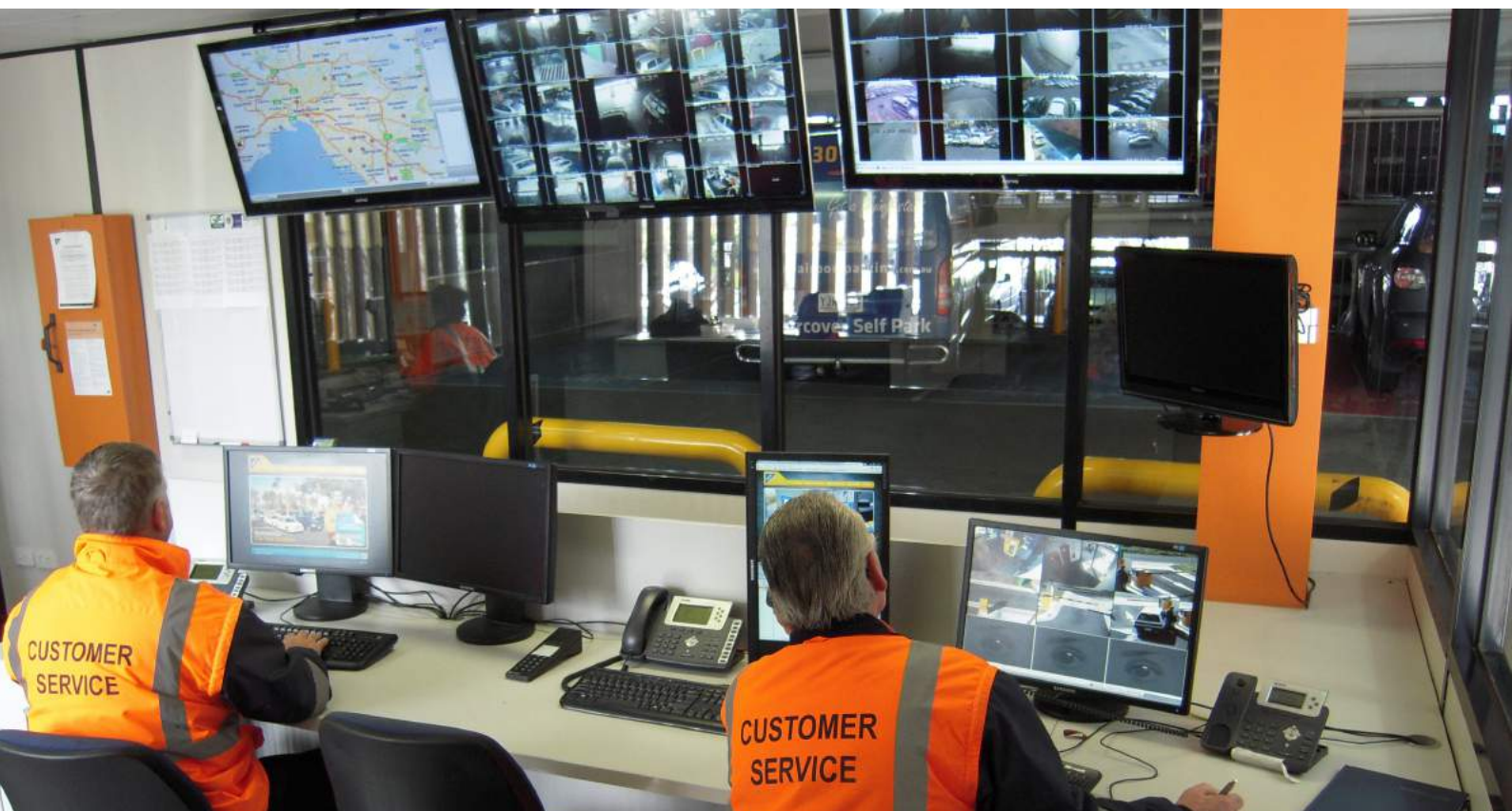




THERE'S NEVER A DULL MOMENT



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There's Never A Dull Moment



*It was hardly the comment we anticipated.
You don't expect a car park operator to say it.
But apparently, "there is never a dull day in parking."*





Written by John Boley

So says James English, head of Melbourne-based Ace Parking. This wholly Australian owned and operated company has been supplying specialist experience as a professional and innovative car parking operator to both private and public clients since 1982, offering services that range from consultancy through to building, owning, managing, leasing, operating and securing car parks throughout Victoria to maximise the profits and streamline the efficiency of managed parking facilities. As well as broad experience in the niche parking industry, the Ace team has extensive wider experience in industries including customer relations, facilities management, finance and real estate.

James brings serious thinking to a business you might believe to be as simple as it was when his father started it. But a whole variety of factors – such as planning constraints, increased traffic, technology in the form of smarter systems for measuring capacity, demand and pricing, not to mention Melbourne’s congestion levy – have conspired to make the running of a car park a much more complicated proposition today. And James is thinking about tomorrow and the

further challenges that will combine to make his job even more interesting.

We caught him at the worst possible time. Mr English senior passed away at the end of 2012 and James was keen to stress to everyone – clients and competitors alike – that Ace would emerge stronger, move forward and upward and expand in memory of his dad. “My father began this business in the side streets of Prahran, Victoria and had to borrow the money to purchase a flat-pack galvanised garden shed that would be our first office and would sit on-site at the car park in Malcolm Street, Prahran (behind Prahran Town Hall). He would go to work on the first tram of the morning and open his office on a freezing winter’s morning with a smile on his face and a warm greeting to all his customers, just to collect \$3 a day in a 35 bay car park.”

**“We have seen a significant growth
in our consultancy services...”**

He developed an excellent rapport with his customers, who all become regulars and this was the starting point for expansion.

"He found another little car park in Richmond with 48 spaces and then another in South Yarra. He would walk every street in the area to find what he thought might be a 'goer.' In the space of three years he had opened five car parks," although collecting no more than four or so dollars a day per car.

Today Ace's portfolio consists of more than 40 car parks with over 5,000 spaces. Some clients who have benefitted from Ace Parking's flexible solutions and services include:

- Ramsey Health
- St George Health Services
- Techne Group
- Peninsula Health (Frankston Hospital)
- 5 SCR Pty Ltd
- Centro Properties Group
- Department of Treasury & Finance
- Vic Roads
- VicTrack
- Vision Australia

- ISPT
- Australian Property Network
- ING Management
- MAB Corporation
- City of Whitehorse
- Senfam Group of companies
- CB Richard Ellis
- DTZ Australia

James says the company has a whole slew of ideas on how to make use of sites profitably, "whether restructuring an existing car park, developing new car parks, providing equipment or finding a cost-effective, fast solution for events parking." In fact, he can even consult with architects about designing buildings that incorporate better car parks. Having studied landscape architecture, he appreciates that parking is rarely given the priority it should get in order to make a building more efficient; for example, there is too much stress placed on maximising the number of bays, when the focus should be placed on the efficiencies of the car park. The car park can ►

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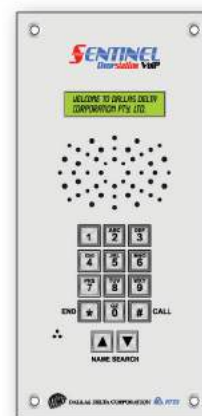


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- ▶ be better utilised through optimising usage and increasing turnover of each bay through simple design and management techniques, such as way finding, new approaches to entry and exit flows off the street, and even dynamic pricing based on proximity to services. The parking industry is largely a convenience based service, only part of the journey to a customer's final destination, hence the importance of ensuring that the parking experience is a seamless, hassle-free one. Drivers will park where it is most convenient and easy, as well as taking account of price.

"Ace's portfolio consists of more than 40 car parks with over 5,000 spaces."

CASE STUDY

A Melbourne city fringe car park with existing equipment poorly maintained and partially manual functions was producing gross income of \$1.2 million. The car park was operating with one entry lane, one pay on exit booth lane and one pass card exit lane. This created long queues to access the car park during the morning peak and a queue of cars up to level 7 to exit the car park in the evening.

After taking over control of this facility from another major operator, Ace Parking conducted a thorough initial site analysis including traffic movement, customer analysis and aesthetics. Ace Parking then recommended the installation of a new fully automated parking system, removing the pay on exit system and introducing a pay station. The centre lane became a tidal lane for entry or exit as demand required, providing two entries and two exits. Clients were then able to pay at the pay station or by automated credit card on exit. As a result of these solutions, queues were eliminated. Furthermore, removal of the booth promoted greater staff interaction with customers. A CCTV system improved the security and cleanliness of the car park. A marketing campaign to local businesses promoting the upgrades and a continued campaign to regain previous clients through voucher schemes produced a gross revenue increase to \$1.7 million within 12 months, an improvement of \$500,000. The cost of improvements, including equipment, was less than \$140,000, giving a return on investment of 35 per cent within 12 months.



Improvements in affordable technology have led to smart systems that could, for example, measure current demand (i.e. what percentage of spaces in a given area are filled) and price accordingly (i.e. as more space is taken, it gets more expensive). But city planners and councils have generally not quite caught up with such novelties, James believes, and are too reliant on more traditional and apparently simpler pricing and flow models. Also, in many cities the relationship between on-street and off-street parking should be re-examined. For example, what is the point of one-hour parking in a street full

of restaurants? Unless it's a burger bar, who dines with friends for 59 minutes?

So far, Ace has concentrated on its Victoria business, but James scans the rest of the country for a suitable opportunity to go interstate (rather than simply buying or leasing any old plot). In the meantime Ace continues to provide its unusual consulting capabilities Australia wide, able to advise on how to maximise the opportunities short or long-term for any given site. "In recent years a growing trend has evolved where ►



► owners are turning to running car parks themselves. Some are successful and others far from it, but they still need the advice, skills and knowledge that comes from years of experience and practice. We have seen a significant growth in our consultancy services which are different to what a lot of consultants presently offer in the market as we are coming from a car park operator's point of view, a business view, rather than a traffic or auditor's view."

"Customer service and good customer handling is as important in car parking as in a department store."

Ace is a leader in remote control and monitoring of parking facilities too, with a 24-hour remote monitoring system that allows immediate response to any issue that arises, including remote intercom assistance services, equipment warning and alarm monitoring (including tamper and break-in alarms, out of order notifications and service warnings), and CCTV surveillance (including remote site inspections and intercom assistance). There is also a Pay & Display ticket machines faults line for customers having equipment difficulty or who need a



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little assistance – like the lady on the day we spoke who complained the machine had given her only one hour's parking, but she had paid for two. An assistant politely informed her that the day hadn't escaped from her and it was actually one hour earlier than she thought. James says customer service and good customer handling is as important in car parking as in a department store. "These services have performed a key role in reducing revenue loss and have dramatically reduced false fault reports and subsequent reported downtime of equipment. The results provide a better than 99.9 per cent uptime for parking equipment operated and managed by Ace Parking."

Ace Parking's Remote Monitoring Control Room is certified for its (HSEQ) Occupational Health and Safety System – AS/NZS 4801 and works to ISO9001 Quality Management System (Lic No: OHS/R61/1010).

"Ace is able to advise on how to maximise the opportunities short or long-term for any given site."

Across Australia capital cities are adopting a congestion levy, as in Melbourne, which was introduced in 2006, since risen by 230 per cent and has had a serious impact on the whole sector, says James, although it remains "an amazingly competitive industry." Ace will continue its innovative approach to the parking industry and create smart parking solutions to deliver, to client and customer alike, cost effective, customer focused services. ■





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