

PARKING TODAY

Volume 15, Number 9-September 2010

www.parkingtoday.com

Beth Tindel and Faye Silverman Run Parking At Kennesaw State

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New Smartphone Parking Applications Get Interactive

BY PETE GOLDIN

THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY for parking has accelerated in 2010 with the emergence of a new trend, interactive smartphone parking applications, marked by the introductions of Google's Open Spot and ParkPatrol for iPhone. Although each application has a different purpose, they both allow people within the same community to interact with each other in real time and help make parking easier.

Google marks the spot

Recently launched on July 9, Open Spot is a Google Labs product developed for use with Android 2.0 and higher, using the open Android platform, Google Maps and AppEngine. The product is still very new, and Google Labs does not consider this a final product.

The purpose of Open Spot is simple – it allows people who are vacating parking spots to notify other users who are currently searching for parking that the space is now available. Open Spot identifies parking spots located within a 1.5 km radius of the user's location, on a Google Maps display. As the user moves, Open Spot automatically refreshes to show parking spots within the current radius.

Users can mark paid and free parking spots, both on street and in parking lots. Red pins on the map designate freshly-marked spots, with orange for spots posted more than 5 minutes ago, and yellow for more than 10 minutes. Spots are removed from the map after 20 minutes.

Open Spot is currently only available in the U.S., Canada and the Netherlands, and Jason Woodard, a Software Engineer at Google Labs, says they are seeing the strongest usage in major cities like New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Open Spot may be introduced to other countries in the future, depending on the success it achieves in current markets.

Turning the tables on parking patrols

Launched in January 2010, ParkPatrol is an iPhone application developed by Australian startup, CRWDPOWER.COM. Users report on locations of parking patrol officers, and also



receive alerts based on these reports when a parking patrol officer is within the vicinity of their parked vehicle. Users report the parking patrol officer's location with the press of a button, and they can view reported sightings on a Google map, and make a determination about the direction the officer is heading. Reported sightings remain on the map for four hours.

ParkPatrol works anywhere in the world where there is an Internet connection available, preferably 3G. CRWDPOWER.COM is in the process of introducing an Android version of

the application, along with a Web version for users with BlackBerry, Microsoft and other handheld technologies. ParkPatrol is currently free, but a paid version with more features may be introduced later in the year.

It might sound like this application is designed to help users circumvent the law – a perspective voiced publicly by Perth CEO Frank Edwards – but Joe Darling, Director of

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CRWDPOWER.COM and inventor of ParkPatrol, insists that is not the purpose.

He says in his home town of Sydney, Australia, for example, ticketing is very aggressive and parkers can get a ticket in 15 seconds, while they are walking down the block to the pay and display kiosk, stepping into a store to get change, or running back to retrieve their car when the meter runs out. Darling points out that parking authorities do not give in any grace, and this application is designed to give the public an advantage, and allow them to make informed decisions on how to handle parking issues.

"It is not a good idea to use ParkPatrol to break the law," Darling warns. "Even though you can see the progression of the patrol officer's movements, you still have no idea what is going to happen."

"It is too early to make a definitive comment one way or the other on the legality of the app," said Edwards. "There is certainly potential for that to happen, for example if people have overstayed in a parking bay and then move their vehicles before a parking and information officer arrives. It will be interesting to see what the take-up rate is for this new technology which relies to such a large extent on input from people on the street."

"I would like to think that ParkPatrol could serve a positive role such as that, Edwards continued, "However, the media coverage to date seems to have focused on 'beating' the parking officers when all they are trying to do is maintain a steady turnover of bays. I think people in general have enough common sense to observe parking restrictions without having to employ such technology.

Darling says reaction from authorities has been positive. In fact, Darling says parking patrol officers have told him that they are using the application currently, reporting their own movements. With this in mind, Darling has contacted several city councils in Australia to develop a partnership in which they would

officially report patrol officer movements via ParkPatrol, but so far he has not received a response. He is also talking with private parking vendors to possibly add information about space availability into ParkPatrol as well.

Grass roots movement

One point that both applications have in common is that they rely on a dedicated user community that will continuously provide input into the system. The challenge is in growing that community.

"Currently we foster dedication with just good karma points, or the warm fuzzy feeling someone gets when they mark a spot," says Woodard. "We hope people share Open Spot with their friends and especially their neighbors."

"We see parking as an important issue for people," he adds.

"Recent studies show that finding a parking spot costs time and money, and is also bad for the environment. By helping people find a parking spot faster, or showing them there is no chance of finding a spot, we hope to help reduce this waste."

ParkPatrol is also using a grass roots movement to gain support. Although ParkPatrol theoretically works anywhere in the world, the application has become very popular in Australia and New Zealand, with more than 80,000 users so far, due to significant publicity on radio and TV. Darling says there is almost no usage in North America and Europe, with only 1,000 users across the two continents, but he expects U.S. adoption to pick up soon.

Both applications seem to be catching on. Darling says it is because parking can be frustrating and these interactive applications are a great way to help each other ease that frustration.

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How to Communicate With Bosses

Brad Smart, author of the best-selling book "Topgrading": How Leading Companies Win by Hiring, Coaching, and Keeping the Best People," has interviewed and coached more than 6,000 top executives, so he has a pretty good idea of how the highest-performing managers in the world expect to be communicated with, and what irritates them.

Smart says that when bosses ask questions, most hate it when people (1) say "it depends"; (2) give long-winded explanations before answering the question; or (3) try to fix problems before alerting their bosses (i.e., hiding problems).

"People do these things out of fear," Smart says.

"People fear they need time to figure out a reply and saying 'it depends' helps them stall for time. The long-winded explanation before getting to the answer comes out of fear that the boss will say no and they won't get a chance to build their case. And hiding problems comes from fearing the wrath of the boss and

from the hope they can fix it before the boss finds out."

Smart says that when the boss asks a question, it's almost always best to answer directly and succinctly. And let bosses know that you'll immediately alert them to a problem, but ask that you get a day to analyze it and report back on (1) how it should have been prevented; (2) what is being done to fix it; and (3) how a recurrence will be prevented.

"Some bosses inspire too much fear in their people," Smart says, "and they can get the type of communications from their team by giving them the chance to explain after the direct response, and giving them a chance to fix problems after they quickly admit them."

(Get a free 50-page e-book, "Avoid Costly Mis-Hires," which summarizes Smart's key "Topgrading" methods, by going to his website: www.SmartTopgrading.com.)