

Tech-driven transformation



Wilson Parking is investing more resources in its digital products, including its innovative Wilson Parking App.

Shift in focus sparks a digital evolution

The ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected countless businesses in unexpected ways, including those in the parking industry, which has had to withstand a sudden and dramatic drop in its regular customer base. What do you do when people stop driving into cities to park?

"It was very confronting in March of 2020. Overnight, the public just stopped coming into cities, to park and work across Australia," says Stephan Wuffli, chief executive of Wilson Parking Australia, the market leader in car park management. Demand for its services declined about 80 per cent initially because more people were working from home and fewer people were travelling. Although some demand has returned, "it is well down on pre-COVID levels".

Wuffli says the company had to make a choice: it could slow down until things improved, or it could completely shift the long-term focus of its business. It could innovate.

For Wilson Parking, that has meant transforming the company from one that manages parking facilities to one centred on making life easier for its customers. The best way to do that is through technology, says Wuffli.

"We've looked in the mirror during COVID, and we've seen what is possible with technology compared to the traditional parking offering of tickets and payment machines," he says. "Our surveys told us customers want a digital payment and access experience and so that is at the focus. It's that mindset shift that we've accelerated in the last two years."

The company has spent those two years

investing in the continued development of the Wilson Parking App, which allows customers to search for and book parking spots. Everything is arranged and paid for via the app. It sounds simple, but it's a substantial shift from a global car park model that has remained relatively unchanged for decades.

Though the app launched in 2018, it became Wilson Parking's primary business channel during the pandemic. Customers have flocked to it, with 60 per cent of the business's daily commuters now booking their parking through the app. It generates 81 per cent of the company's online revenue, and it's Australia's highest-rated app for off-street parking. Since March 2020, bookings via the app have increased by 170 per cent.

"It was a supplementary channel pre-COVID," says Wuffli. "It was already a good app, and we had a long-term roadmap to grow the channel. But we've had to condense that down and do it in the last 20 months."

The pivot to technology is reflected in the company's staff. They've created a number of new roles, including chief product officer and chief technology officer, in charge of developing Wilson Parking's B2C Innovation Program, aimed at improving the app and delivering new tech-based products to the customer.

Wuffli says Wilson Parking customers are using the app primarily because it's convenient. They can search for the nearest car parks with available spaces, and people can book their car park before leaving the house. The company has created App Perks, an in-app rewards program for frequent



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Stephan Wuffli

users. "It's not just about the app, because we're also changing our culture," says Wuffli.

"Innovation is now at the forefront of our strategy. Business plans in previous years were very contract and portfolio-focused. Now we're customer-led."

Other pandemic-related trends have driven the app's success. People are avoiding public transport in favour of driving, and they also want car parking arrangements that reflect more flexible working hours. Plus, the app is contactless. Customers don't have to carry tickets, push buttons or stand in queues at ticket machines.

The company is also working on a new subscription-style parking plan, an increasingly popular and transparent payment model already familiar to consumers.

Wuffli says the whole Wilson Parking team is on board for a new future, with innovation now part of their everyday conversations.

The company operates in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. Despite its large scale, it has a "strong family culture" and has been embedded in its regional parking markets for almost 60 years.

"I think the success of the app is reinforcing and motivating our entire team to be more innovative, because it's what's going to prepare us for the future," says Wuffli. "Though we're not throwing away the successes of the past."

"But now there's this heightened sense of urgency, and requirement to innovate. We want to transform ourselves and the industry. We're the market leader, so we'll be setting the tone."

Parking made easier.

Download the **Wilson Parking App** to book at our parking sites across Australia. It's the fast and easy way to search, book and park.

wilsonparking.com.au/app