



Overcrowded car parks are a thing of the past for Devon County Council

Council implements ecommerce platform from MSM Software to manage car parking regulations and generate new revenue streams

With a large workforce based at Devon County Council's County Hall, the car park was struggling to cope. After introducing a Travel Plan, that included transport initiatives and parking charges, to encourage sustainable travel and discourage single car occupancy, the Council needed a manageable and efficient ecommerce system. With help from a tailored ecommerce platform from MSM Software, the Council has:

- reduced overcrowding in the County Hall car park
- significantly reduced the time spent on engaging with employees about parking regulations via a clear car parking policy
- generated a revenue stream to fund a park and ride, and bus ticket subsidy scheme for employees
- met its environmental objectives and set an example to other employers and Local Authorities in the region

Devon County Council

Devon County Council (DCC) is the largest employer in the county and houses over 2,000 employees at the County Hall, including those working for other occupiers such as the local NHS Trust.

Bumper to bumper

With such a large workforce based at County Hall, the car park was struggling to cope. Employees were often spending up to an hour waiting for a vacant space and there was no incentive for them to change to more sustainable travel modes.

Charlotte Reynolds, Business Transformation Unit – Corporate Assets at Devon County Council, explains, “We recognised that a new car parking system would relieve pressure on limited resources and would advance our environmental objectives, while setting an example to other employers in the city: as a planning authority we frequently require those planning new developments to produce full travel plans. We needed to set an example; to have our own travel plan in place and to be seen to be adhering to those same principles.”

DCC initially introduced a system which restricted employees' access to the car park to four days a week. The system was monitored through reports from the barrier entry system and then issued warnings to employees found to be breaking the rules. This system required a high level of human management as well as a significant amount of employee engagement following the amount of questions raised by employees. Consequently, DCC identified that a new system was needed to set clear guidelines for employees on its car parking policy, in turn reducing the amount of manpower required.

DCC introduced a site specific Travel Plan for County Hall to encourage sustainable travel and discourage single car occupancy. The Plan limited each employee to parking on campus three days per week. Restricting access to the car park meant that DCC needed an incentive for employees to use other travel methods. To put alternative transport initiatives in place, a revenue stream was required to fund those schemes. The Travel Plan included the introduction of chargeable parking, with charges related to pay grade.

DCC makes the best use of technology and innovations to improve the way it does business and it recognised that an ecommerce solution could manage both the restrictions and payment to the car park without human supervision.

Taking the driving seat

To ensure DCC's internal IT department could focus on its core activities, it approached local organisations to tender for the project. Local software solutions company, MSM Software, won the tender as DCC recognised the company's experience and expertise in delivering projects within Local Government.

"MSM spent time with us in order to understand our requirements so we felt confident from the outset in its ability to deliver a successful solution. The team instantly grasped the nature, size and sensitivity of the project and the factors involved," says Reynolds.

MSM carried out an in depth business analysis which determined the design and build of the solution. Using this data, MSM created a tailored ecommerce platform, written in .Net and using SQL Server 2005. This allowed staff to pay for parking in advance through the payroll and was integrated into staff identity smartcard systems and the physical car park barrier control software.



MSM also included a design feature in the software that gives DCC flexibility to manage part time personnel on a pro rata basis.

Parking with success

The project was completed on time in November 2009 and under budget. The revenue generated from the new car parking system is ring fenced to fund a park and ride scheme and bus ticket subsidy scheme for employees.

Reynolds says, “Since deploying MSM’s ecommerce platform, we have been able to implement a clear car parking policy. This has significantly reduced the time we previously spent engaging with our employees about parking rules and regulations. Plus, the car park is no longer overcrowded, which means our employees are choosing more environmentally friendly forms of transport to get to work, which ultimately meets the objectives outlined in our Travel Plan.”

The project has been such a success that DCC has received several enquiries from other Local Authorities, who are keen to hear more about this innovative project and are now considering rolling out a similar scheme.

Thomas Coles, managing director of MSM Software, comments, “Devon County Council required a unique and flexible software solution; the complex requirements of this project meant that an off-the-shelf solution would have had little benefit or value. What’s more, by outsourcing their IT requirements for this project to us, the council’s internal team has been able to focus on the core activities central to the services the council provides. Working closely with the council we have built a platform around specific requirements which will save time and resources, and drive business efficiencies for the future.”