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Smart parkers use their own meters

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New scheme a hit with businesses, and lucrative for council.

NICK CHURCHOUSE

PARKING change is for chumps. The parking elite around Wellington are renting their own meters — to go inside the car.

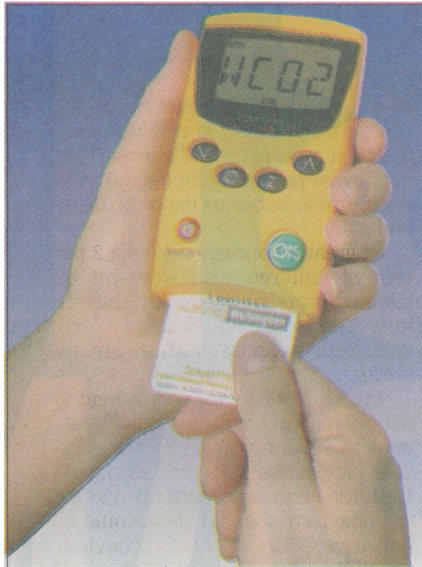
Two years after being introduced, Smartpark meters are pulling in nearly \$500,000 for Wellington City Council.

The small cashless parking units have grown in popularity, with 950 now in use around Wellington.

Introduced in May 2004, the Motorola-manufactured units were initially picked up by small businesses such as service and delivery companies, but are now regular issue for corporates such as Television New Zealand and Lion Nathan, Smartpark operations manager Mark Lockery said.

Each unit is leased for \$9 a month and prepaid Smartpark cards are bought from Wellington City Council.

Drivers start the meter when they park and put it on the dashboard. They turn it off when they return to their car. "It works out cheaper because you only pay for the time you



Hassle free: The Smartpark units are making parking easier

actually park and if you get held up you don't have to rush back to your car to put more money into the meter," Mr Lockery said.

The system is in use in 45 European cities, but Wellington is the only New Zealand centre to adopt Smart-park, with Hamilton now trialling the system.

"Wellington City Council is one of

the more forward-thinking councils and saw the potential it had for the public," Mr Lockery said.

Council property and standards manager Wayne Tacon said the scheme was working well and was popular with businesses because it made it easy to keep track of parking expenses.

Customer feedback to Smart-park had been overwhelmingly positive, Mr Lockery said.

"It takes the negative feeling out of paying for your parking — you just switch the thing on and forget about it."

Comments from feedback e-mails centred on not having to worry about finding parking change, and saving money from only paying for the parking time used.

Most people enjoyed the freedom of not having to use an inflexible parking meter.

But beware — Smartpark does not make you invincible. People could still get tickets for overstaying the maximum time or loading the wrong parking zone into the meter, Mr Tacon said.

A blinking light on the machine signals to parking wardens if a car overstays the maximum time limit, almost guaranteeing a ticket.

"And some people even forget to turn them on," he said.

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