

# Racine Truck Stop Solves Parking Shortage with Controlled Solution



## **CUSTOMER NAME**

Racine, WI PETRO

## **PRODUCTS**

Truck Stop Parking Revenue System

## **SUMMARY**

With the national truck parking shortage, Willkomm's Racine PETRO was increasingly unable to provide parking to their regular customers. Racine PETRO's lot was consistently full, but not with drivers who intended to purchase fuel or food. Between heavy truck traffic and the parking shortage, the truck stop needed a solution to ensure their regular patrons would have a place to park safely for the night.

# ORGANIZATION

Opened in 1993, Willkomm's Racine PETRO is nestled in Southeast Wisconsin and serves the traveling public, professional drivers and interstate motorists.

# SITUATION

In Racine, Wisconsin, Willkomm's Racine PETRO struggled to provide parking spaces to their regular customers. Located right off Interstate 94 and State Trunk Highway 20, the truck stop is a convenient, safe location for commercial drivers to stop for fuel and rest.

According to the American Trucking Associations (ATA), there is one parking space available for every 11 truck drivers. And 98% of drivers regularly struggle to find a safe place to park, with the average driver spending 56 minutes per day searching for a parking spot (American Transportation Research Institute).

Between the national truck parking shortage and the convenient location of Willkomm's Racine, WI PETRO, the 185 available parking spaces routinely filled up between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. each evening — but many drivers who secured a parking space overnight had already fueled up and ate a meal elsewhere.

Willkomm's Racine PETRO prides itself on offering a full-service truck stop to commercial drivers, including fuel, service, store and restaurants. When the parking spots were full, but revenue on food and fuel were down, Michael Willkomm, Co-owner and President of Willkomm's Racine PETRO, knew he wasn't servicing his regular customers. He kept hearing that his customers were attempting to stop but couldn't because there was no place to park.



In addition, \$200,000 per year is budgeted to keep the parking lot maintained, including property taxes, snow removal and general upkeep.

Not only was Racine PETRO missing their regular drivers on a nightly basis, but it seemed that they had begun to give away their well-maintained lot without anything in return. Willkomm wanted to ensure his regular patrons would have a secure spot to park and rest instead of having to drive past Racine PETRO.

## SOLUTION

After researching various parking systems, Willkomm began seeking out a solutions provider to help him control the truck stop parking lot. While exploring local solutions, Willkomm discovered TAPCO.

His objective was to retain free spaces for his regular customers while charging those who only wanted to utilize the lot. The solution? A validation system.

The system is designed so customers who spend \$50 at the truck stop or buy 75 gallons of fuel can park free for 24 hours. For drivers only looking to park overnight, the spot costs \$15 for 24 hours. And customers can stay up to two hours for free.



Working with TAPCO, Willkomm designed a system with one point of entry and two exit points. The entrance is equipped with a license plate recognition system, a terminal ticket dispenser, a parking gate arm and two bollards. The two exit lanes each contain a license plate recognition system, a vehicle pay station, a parking gate arm and two bollards. A payment station was also installed inside of the truck stop. Further, the service center is equipped with a validation system as well, offering free parking to drivers having their trucks serviced. Additionally, barricades line the lot, so drivers looking to park are required to take a ticket upon entry.

Customer service is top-of-mind for Willkomm, and he wanted to ensure ease of use for drivers. To do so, each parking device is connected, so drivers who opt for validation are automatically allowed to exit via license plate recognition, along with drivers who paid ahead of time or stopped for less than two hours. Drivers who didn't pay or validate ahead of time have the option to pay at the exit.

TAPCO worked alongside Willkomm to engineer and design a solution for Racine PETRO's specific parking needs. Depending on the truck stop, solutions may vary. Parking experts at TAPCO are ready to customize solutions based on individual concerns. While TAPCO provided all equipment necessary to implement the truck stop parking solution for PETRO's, a third-party company laid concrete and installed electric. For the solution to succeed, TAPCO helped provide specifications for the concrete and electrical installation. Other available solutions include signage such as dynamic message signs (DMS) to communicate current capacity and rates and parking management software to monitor everything from validation to occupancy and more.

## RESULTS

Following the initial installation in 2021, 55% of drivers were validating their parking and 45% were paying to park. At first, some drivers were wary of the newly controlled lot, but warmed to the idea once Willkomm explained that with a fuel and/or food purchase at the truck stop, parking would be free — plus, the controlled lot would help secure drivers a space.

A year and a half later, PETRO's numbers are still growing with the percentage of drivers validating their parking up to 57%. Additionally, fuel volume has increased. And the 43% of drivers that pay for parking bring in an added monthly revenue of \$20,000.

***“I wish we would have done this three years ago,”***

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*Michael Willkomm, Co-owner and President of Willkomm's Racine PETRO*



Since the installation, Willkomm's Racine, WI PETRO has been able to ensure that their patrons will have space to park and drivers are able to count on Racine PETRO for a safe space to sleep, saving them time and worry.

While providing parking spaces to his regular customers was Willkomm's goal, he's seen quite a few unexpected but welcome benefits from controlling the parking lot. It's cleaner, safer and has become a place drivers see value in. "Not only are you providing a safe and convenient place for drivers to park, but you're also benefiting as your parking lot stays cleaner and it becomes a place people can take pride in," Willkomm says. "I'm hoping more people give it a try and see the success we've had because I think it helps our drivers and the industry as a whole."

**"Controlling the parking lot turned out to be the best improvement we made [during the renovation]."**

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*Michael Willkomm, Co-owner and President of Willkomm's Racine PETRO*

## ABOUT TAPCO

As an industry-leading innovator, TAPCO manufactures, services and distributes a wide portfolio of traffic and parking safety solutions designed to increase safe travels for all. Since 1956, we have set the standard for delivering reliable, cutting-edge traffic safety enhancements. From our world-renowned line of LED-enhanced BlinkerSign® solutions to our pedestrian crossing products and early detection warning systems, safety is at the heart of all TAPCO innovations.

Working alongside traffic professionals for more than 60 years gives our team an exclusive perspective on the past, present and future needs of the traffic and parking safety industry.

