

By David Ward

# Branding Spaces

## Parking Sponsorships Provide Airports With More Than Just New Revenue

Dallas Love Field secured sponsorship of its airport valet parking from local luxury car dealer Sewell Automotive.

Looking to offset revenue lost to off-site parking, as well as for a new way to engage local travelers, several U.S. airports are turning one of their most visible features, on-site parking, into a branding and sponsorship platform.

Sponsorships tied to airport parking remain few and far between, but the airports that have done them appear to suggest they can be a win-win-win for the airport, a corporate brand partner and the traveling public.

**Kansas City International (MCI)** is one of those airports, and Justin Meyer, deputy director of aviation for marketing and air service development, says the deal came about largely as the result of seizing an opportunity to work with local professional soccer team Sporting Kansas City.

Meyer explains that although other professional sports teams in the area, such as baseball's Kansas City Royals and football's Kansas City Chiefs, fly players, coaches and staff to away games via charter plane, Sporting Kansas City has its players park at the airport and fly commercial flights.

Noticing this, airport officials approached the team with an offer: Sporting Kansas City's players, coaches and staff would get free prime parking on game weekends in the



structure right next to the terminal in exchange for marketing considerations.

"We look at this as a trade, because the time our parking garage is full is typically Mondays and Tuesdays due to business travelers," Meyer says. "But they're not full on weekends, and that's when the players are traveling."

In exchange for the free parking, MCI gets a coupon/ad on the ticket Sporting KC fans receive when parking at home games.

"We are placing coupons on the cars of every Sporting KC ticketholder," Meyer explains. "On the front of the card, it says which spot they should park in, while the back of the card includes our coupon."



**Left:** Boston Logan International's sponsorship deal with Lexus and the car maker's area dealers includes signage, as well as preferred airport parking spaces and other benefits for Lexus Passport Gold members.



**Right:** Officials at Kansas City International were able to partner with professional soccer team Sporting Kansas City, bartering free airport parking for players, coaches and staff on away-game weekends in exchange for an ad/coupon on parking lot tickets used during the team's home games.

The coupon offers discounted parking at the airport on specific days and is aimed at fans looking to follow the team to road games in cities such as Denver and Chicago.

"What we're hoping to do is shift the travel habits of some of those fans who use the airport from maybe parking off-site to parking with us," Meyer explains, adding that in addition to giving away coupons at home games, the airport mails a coupon to every Sporting KC fan that has a ticket to one of the team's away games.

The program is still in its first year making metrics hard to determine, but Meyer says at least some of these coupons have been redeemed by fans.

He adds that in addition to boosting parking on weekends, the program gives MCI the chance to educate an affluent audience of sports fans about the benefits and convenience of on-airport parking.

### Perks For Lexus Drivers At BOS

Jeff Eischen, COO of **Airport Marketing Income**, has worked with several airports on parking structure sponsorships, including a deal at **Boston Logan International (BOS)** that's been running for more than four years.

"I think sponsorships are getting more widely accepted as a marketing tool and we're doing our part to make airports more user-friendly for some of these brands to work with," he says, adding that many of the same brand categories that advertise inside airport terminals, including automotive,

health and wellness, and technology, are also the ones being targeted as potential parking sponsors.

"If you look at the luxury auto category, for example, they spend heavily in airports and not just on advertising," Eischen explains. "They're mainly focused on impressions and clearly the demographics fit."

For the sponsorship at BOS, Eischen and his team brought in auto maker Lexus and the New England Lexus Dealers Association for a VIP parking program. Lexus Passport Gold provides numerous benefits to Lexus owners, including discounted premium spaces inside Logan's parking structure, as well as things such as free airport Wi-Fi and dining discounts at concessionaires such as Legal Sea Foods inside the terminal.

"We had Lexus, the corporate brand, and the local dealers association actively involved and using social media and incentivizing and motivating people to get into the dealership, whether it be for servicing or for purchasing vehicles," Eischen explains, adding, "For the airport, this goes beyond just sponsorship revenue, which the airport appreciates. It also

offers them the ability to provide a new traveler experience."

### Auto Dealer Signs On At DAL

AMI recently began a similar program at **Dallas Love Field (DAL)**, though the brand partner in this case is a luxury local auto dealer, **Sewell Automotive**, rather than a specific brand.

The sponsorship includes parking incentives, as well as a display at the DAL parking structure, where Sewell Automotive regularly showcases the latest in luxury cars.

"One month they may bring in a GMC Yukon, and the next month it could be a Lexus or an Infiniti," Eischen explains.

The Sewell airport parking sponsorship has been up and running for less than a year but appears to be working very well, notes DAL Assistant Director of Aviation Administration Lynetta Kidd.

"The coordination of getting the appropriate staff in place like fire marshall and bomb squad, security, operations and valet parking took a couple of tries before it

came together but now is a very smooth procedure,” Kidd says. “The traveling public seems to enjoy seeing the cars and we have not had any problems with the displays.”

As for how long it might continue, Kidd says the program “looks to be beneficial to all involved and can continue as long as everyone is agreeable on the terms.”

## Sponsorships Not Just Hanging Signs

Eischen says he’s in talks with other major airport authorities about potential parking sponsorships but notes the negotiations can be a time-consuming process.

“Certain airport authorities seem willing to do these things but there are also some that may not,” he explains. “Multiple departments within the authority need to be involved in this because it is a lot more than simply hanging signs in the garage.”

But with many airports concerned about off-airport lots eroding their business, parking sponsorships can provide a marketing income stream and a lot more, Eischen says.

“We feel we’ve certainly tapped into something here,” he says. “If you do it the right way and work with the right brand partner, that brand can really assist the airport in driving traffic to the parking garage.” ■

We’d like to hear your opinion about this article. Please direct all correspondence to Carol Ward at [carol@airportrevenue.com](mailto:carol@airportrevenue.com).

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