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**Systematic Analysis Reduces One Chicago Location's Parking Tickets by 50%**

posted by [martyb](#) on Wednesday August 15, @11:25AM  
from the **Your-honor,-there-was-a-tree-branch-blocking-the-sign!** dept.

[infodragon](#) writes:

Utilizing FOIA and some clever software Mr. Chapman quickly identifies a troubled spot for parking in Chicago and gets results!

<http://mchap.io/using-foia-data-and-unix-to-halve-major-source-of-parking-tickets.html>

The story relates how the author used Freedom of Information Act requests to gather raw data on parking tickets issued in Chicago. What he received was a semicolon-delimited text file containing a great number of data entry errors. The author outlines the steps taken to clean and extract data on a likely problematic parking location. Armed with this data, he visited the location and discovered very confusing signage. He reported this to the city, who rectified the signage. This led to a 50 percent decrease in the number of tickets issued for that location.

I immediately asked myself three things

1. How much more effective has that corner become?
2. Who's grumbling about the loss of revenue?
3. What would happen if more of us did this very thing?

[Original Submission](#)

(1)

- **what would happen (Score: 2, Insightful) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @12:04PM (11 children)**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @12:04PM ([#721745](#))

what would happen is that you would lose your job, because instead of doing your job you're doing the city's job.  
what you should do is publicize the story (as you are already doing), and tell the city that if they don't have someone doing this for a living, they should. in the sense that you gather signatures in order to propose it at the city council or whatever the local procedure is.

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 2) by [crafoo](#) on Wednesday August 15, @12:31PM (8 children)**

by [crafoo \(6639\)](#)  on Wednesday August 15, @12:31PM ([#721748](#))

There is certainly someone responsible in city government for doing this work. They just are not doing it.

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 5, Insightful) by [Unixnut](#) on Wednesday August 15, @12:57PM (6 children)**

by [Unixnut \(5779\)](#) on Wednesday August 15, @12:57PM ([#721754](#))

> There is certainly someone responsible in city government for doing this work. They just are not doing it.

Because if they actually did it like this guy did, they would be fired.

You think a 50% reduction in income would make your superiors happy? Quite frankly you would be more successful in government if you found a way to increase ticket revenue (without making it blatant to the public). You would increase the income of your department, plus the actual enforcement department could demand a higher budget due to the increase in violations. Everybody wins (except the public, but that is by design).

The only reason they fixed this is because when faced with a member of the public, newspapers, and the facts, they could not weasel their way out of it, nor could they just put it under "recommendation" and forget about it. I suspect they will be worried that now this has been found out, other such "profit spots" will be discovered by the public, and before you know it, their overall income will drop.

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 2) by [infodragon](#) on Wednesday August 15, @01:29PM (2 children)**

by [infodragon \(3509\)](#) on Wednesday August 15, @01:29PM ([#721764](#))

And that is why I have point #2! Grumbling in the government due to loss of revenue often leads to someone being punished or fired. Power has to be used and protected!

From the article it was about \$60k/year reduction in revenue. That is a LOT of money someone is no longer pocketing.

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Don't settle for shampoo, demand real poo!

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 0) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:38PM (1 child)**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:38PM ([#721786](#))

Chicago sold off its parking space to private interests for 50 years. If ticket revenue is no longer going to the city, they have no more interest in confusing signage.

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 1) by [nitehawk214](#) on Wednesday August 15, @02:45PM**

by [nitehawk214 \(1304\)](#) on Wednesday August 15, @02:45PM ([#721794](#))

If the confusing signage is impacting residents, they may well vote the people allowing such a situation out.

Also, more subtle effects, like in my township, there was a confusingly labeled no-parking spot near a corner. This caused the garbage truck not to be able to get on to the street, meaning garbage could not be collected if someone parked on the corner.

A complaint to the township resulted in a new sign and yellow paint that makes it quite clear. Additionally they stepped up towing people that parked illegally, and enforced the ban on unregistered and undriveable vehicles stored on public streets.

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"Don't you ever miss the days when you used to be nostalgic?" -Loiosh

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 1, Insightful) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:00PM (1 child)**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:00PM ([#721773](#))

You think a 50% reduction in income would make your superiors happy? Quite frankly you would be more successful in government if you found a way to increase ticket revenue (without making it blatant to the public).

I expect people who rant at how evil the government is don't actually know anybody who works in the government. I do. As a general rule, they are good people who are trying to do the right thing. Do you think on average the post office employees are thinking "if we intentionally misdeliver mail, we can ask for a bigger budget," or that teachers are thinking "I should call in extra sick days, because I can!" Of course there are bad apples, and there are occasional massive conspiracies, but they are the exception, rather than the rule. Why do you think that the Chicago Department of Transportation would punish a civil servant who is making the system work better.

I get really annoyed at the commonly accepted cynical view that "government is the problem." More likely there was an opportunity for improvement here, it was brought to the attention of the Department of Transportation in a credible way, and it was acted upon to improve the lives of all the citizens. It's just like reporting pot holes, or street lights being burned out. There is bureaucratic red tape to get the right person informed, but that's because government is complicated (like any large corporation), not by design.

You might try reporting "that annoying stop light which is always out of sync with the rest of the street and causing traffic nightmares" one of these days. You may be surprised when the local civil planners actually respond.

You would increase the income of your department, plus the actual enforcement department could demand a higher budget due to the increase in violations.

This is a valid argument, except it isn't true. Different departments have different budgets. It is way oversimplified to think of it all as "the government." For example, do you know how much the members of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) dislike the Transportation Security Administration (TSA)? Why would the Department of Transportation would engage in such dangerous actions to benefit the Police and the Court?

The main times you see this kind of mustache-twirling abuse is at a higher level than departments, such as the city council installing red light cameras because it increases the overall general budget to the city. That's way above the level of a civil servant and a manager.

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 0) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:56PM**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:56PM ([#721800](#))

> It's just like reporting pot holes,

This. I report pot holes in my vicinity, in particular ones along the edge of the road where I bicycle. When they get fixed (usually a week or two, weather depending), I send a short "thanks" email to the guy I've found at the Department of Transportation.

- **Re:what would happen (Score: 1) by [nitehawk214](#) on Wednesday August 15, @02:41PM**

by [nitehawk214 \(1304\)](#) on Wednesday August 15, @02:41PM ([#721790](#))

The person who designs where to put parking signs is not paid by the revenue of parking tickets.





Otherwise that would be a *bit* of a conflict of interest.

They are probably just a general civil engineer on the municipality's staff, or a contractor in places with no need for a full time engineer.

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"Don't you ever miss the days when you used to be nostalgic?" -Loiosh

▪ **Re:what would happen (Score: 4, Insightful) by RS3 on Wednesday August 15, @12:58PM**

by [RS3 \(6367\)](#) on Wednesday August 15, @12:58PM ([#721755](#))

And that, in my humble opinion, is the core of today's problems with govt: we think we can go on living life, trusting that govt. workers are doing their jobs at all, let alone correctly, thoroughly, and to We the People's satisfaction.

Right now, loosely through youtube, twitter, facebroke, etc., govt. officials, police, etc., are being outed. We need more of that, structured and organized. We need to elect officials who want govt. kept clean and work with Citizen Watchdog-type organizations, Innocence Project, etc.

“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty; power is ever stealing from the many to the few.” Wendell Philips  
<http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2011/01/eternal-vigilance-is-price-of-liberty.html> [thisdayinquotes.com]

◦ **Re:what would happen (Score: 1, Insightful) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @12:55PM**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @12:55PM ([#721752](#))

what would happen is that you would lose your job

Some people have hobbies. For some its goats and sheep, for some it's analyzing parking tickets in their cities.

◦ **...and thus ends civil society... (Score: 0) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @03:17PM**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @03:17PM ([#721814](#))

*what would happen is that you would lose your job, because instead of doing your job you're doing the city's job.*

And thus dies civic-mindedness (and pretty much any sense of community that once helped glue us together as a people), as we all crawl into our little corners, cover our eyes, and ignore what affects our fellow citizens (or even ourselves) because "it isn't our job." It reminds me of filthy American hospitals (where I've spent far too much time myself, and with my spouse) that never get cleaned properly because no nurse is going to pick up a piece of trash and put it in the garbage (it's beneath him/her and "not their job"), cleaning services are underpaid, understaffed, overworked, and apathetic/demoralized, etc. etc.

We will die beneath a mountain of false dichotomy, false equivalency, whatabouttism, but most of all, a complete absence of community and civic-mindedness as we all retreat into our own shells and refuse to help identify or solve problems because "it isn't our job." And some rightwing-fuckwit will tell us if we do otherwise, we'll "rightly" lose our jobs because we should use every waking moment to enrich our employer and 0.1%er overlords, rather than spending any time voluntarily helping our community.

Nice world you've helped create. The only bright spot (if you can call it that) is it will probably implode under its own weight before too much longer. Pity it's going to take us all down with it.

• **Taking the cake (Score: 1, Interesting) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:08PM (2 children)**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @02:08PM ([#721776](#))

Only in Australia - <https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/motoring/on-the-road/is-this-the-most-confusing-parking-sign-in-australia/news-story/6dabaf5e2b14f6bb9c1761b2a19fbccc> [news.com.au]

[Take a chill pill and have a kit kat](#) [twitter.com]

◦ **Re:Taking the cake (Score: 1) by nitehawk214 on Wednesday August 15, @02:49PM (1 child)**

by [nitehawk214 \(1304\)](#) on Wednesday August 15, @02:49PM ([#721796](#))

I enjoy that it is "four-hour parking from 6pm to 10pm", when there are only 4 hours between 6pm and 10pm.

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"Don't you ever miss the days when you used to be nostalgic?" -Loiosh

▪ **Re:Taking the cake (Score: 0) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @03:33PM**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday August 15, @03:33PM ([#721820](#))

and there is a typo

• **... Profit! (Score: 2) by requerdanos on Wednesday August 15, @02:44PM**

by [requerdanos \(5997\)](#) ★ on Wednesday August 15, @02:44PM ([#721793](#)) [Journal](#)

1. How much more effective has that corner become?
2. Who's grumbling about the loss of revenue?
3. What would happen if more of us did this very thing?

Or, for the suspicious-of-government among us, to what other corner did the city move the confusing, ticket-generating signage?

**(1)** *I came to MIT to get an education for myself and a diploma for my mother.*