



Microsoft MapPoint System Customer Solution Case Study

The power of location



Vermont Tourism Website Builds Business with Location Solution

Overview

Country: United States

Industry: Retail
Hospitality

Customer Profile

Vermont's Department of Tourism and Marketing is responsible for promoting statewide businesses by providing useful tools and information to visitors.

Business Situation

Tourism is one of Vermont's key industries. Restrictions on billboards and roadside signs were not helping statewide businesses, many of which are rural and hard to find, link up with visitors.

Solution

Microsoft MapPoint Web Service was integrated into the state's tourism website to deliver comprehensive lodging, dining, event and attraction location information.

Benefits

- Over 750,000 website referrals
- Customizable rural geocoding
- Future website capabilities
- Visitor calls drop 24 percent
- .NET infrastructure extended

“MapPoint Web Service has played a key role in our website's growth and its value to users. September saw a record one million page views with 7,400 unique visitors, a 20 percent jump in 12 months.”

Bruce Hyde, Commissioner of Tourism and Marketing, State of Vermont

Tourism is a main source of revenue for the state of Vermont, so Vermont pays close attention to details in that sector. Using the IT expertise of Competitive Computing (C₂) and Microsoft® MapPoint® Web Service, Vermont's Department of Tourism and Marketing developed a model website. It generates referrals and revenue for approximately 2,600 businesses and detailed maps and directions for its one million monthly visitors. The website helps offset the challenge presented by restrictions on roadside signs, which dramatically affect businesses' marketing ability. MapPoint Web Service tools enable customer databases to be easily uploaded, and customized geocoding solves rural location challenges with pinpoint accuracy. Travel-related calls needing live operators are down 24 percent due to the comprehensive location and direction information now integrated into the state's tourism website.



“Businesses can customize data sets as part of MapPoint Web Service. If a location is not geocoded properly, a tool allows a new ‘push pin’ to be placed to generate the exact location when queried.”

Bruce Hyde

Commissioner of Tourism and Marketing

State of Vermont

Situation

Vermont’s Department of Tourism & Marketing was seeking a way to go beyond an attractive website to make it a powerful marketing tool for all of its statewide business participants. It also wanted to become a comprehensive resource for visitors.

However, many of its businesses were small, entrepreneurial craftsmen or picturesque inns located in rural settings. Recreational sites and event sponsors also faced the problem of tourist awareness and location.

Further, a ban on billboards and restrictions on roadside signs limited the ability of businesses to communicate directly with tourists for more comprehensive information and directions. Businesses faced a marketing problem, and interested visitors had a knowledge-access problem. The ingredient common to both was location — what was the most economical and efficient way to help visitors and businesses find each other?

The Department of Tourism & Marketing explored the features and functionality of MapQuest as a part of its website but discovered that the service lacked the ability to accurately locate or adjust for rural businesses.

Vermont’s Department of Tourism & Marketing needed a website location and mapping solution that was easy to adapt to its website, accommodated its own custom data sets, provided a way to adjust for site-specific geocoding, could be updated in a straightforward way, and provided for future expansion.

“The mapping solution we needed boiled down to ease and accuracy,” said Bruce Hyde, Vermont’s commissioner for the Department of Tourism & Marketing.

Solution

Using the IT expertise of C2, MapPoint Web Service and its powerful development tools and environment, the Department of Tourism & Marketing found the right location solution for its website. For instance, customized latitude and longitude (“lat/long”) capabilities within MapPoint Web Service solved the marketing and accuracy problems associated with MapQuest and rural business addresses.

“Vermont businesses have the ability to upload and customize their data sets as a part of MapPoint Web Service,” said Bruce Hyde, Vermont commissioner of Tourism and Marketing. “If some locations are discovered not to be geocoded properly, a simple tool allows a new lat/long ‘push pin’ to be placed that generates the precise location when a query is submitted.”

The website also helps generate revenue for businesses by directly linking them to enthusiastic visitors.

For example, an intuitive Travel Planner allows a website visitor to discover lodging, dining, event and attraction options along with detailed maps and driving instructions. Under each category, a user can conduct a multilayer search that may include key word or town, region or other criteria. Want directions to a cozy little inn located in the Northeast Kingdom area with a sauna, is dog-friendly and has a data port? A few appropriately checked boxes send the query out to the Microsoft MapPoint Web Service site, and detailed maps and directions are returned in seconds.

The website Vermontvacation.com is free for all Vermont businesses. The Department of Tourism & Marketing boasts a robust database of more than 2,600 companies and organizations statewide.

“Calls for detailed location and direction information are down 24 percent. We’ve saved thousands of dollars and gained room to grow without adding personnel.”

Bruce Hyde

Commissioner of Tourism and Marketing

State of Vermont

Competitive Computing not only created the Vermontvacation.com website but developed a simple user interface that businesses use to submit location and promotional information. This self-help update capability greatly speeds the task of keeping location information current.

Benefits

Over 2,600 Vermont businesses get 750,000 website referrals or location information per year

“MapPoint Web Service has played a key role in our website’s growth and its value to users, noted Hyde. “September saw a record one million page views with 7,400 unique visitors, a 20 percent jump in 12 months.”

Part of the state’s tourism website is for internal or business-to-business use only.

“All lodging businesses are able to ‘see’ one another’s two-day availability,” said Hyde.

“That means they can quickly refer patrons to other in-state properties with vacancies.”

For instance, one hotel manager in the southern part of Vermont posted his 80-room availability early one Saturday, and in two hours the MapPoint Web Service-enabled site helped sell out the entire block of rooms and quickly directed customers to the right location.

Many Vermont businesses deeply depend; in some cases solely depend, on the state’s Vermontvacation.com site for referrals and the delivery of location information to site visitors. Along with specific address and contact information, each business can provide an additional 30-word searchable description. That means the marketing of unique activities such as mountain biking, glass blowing or milking demonstrations are made more convenient.

All of Vermont’s businesses have direct access to the Vermontvacation.com site so new information can easily be added to keep a site updated and fresh. Information from first-time businesses must be screened by the site’s webmaster. Once a part of the site, businesses may regularly update their own information.

Unique customizable geocoding solves rural location problems with pinpoint accuracy

One of the challenges the Department of Tourism & Marketing faced was the precise location or latitude-longitude (“lat/long”) information for rural inns and bed and breakfasts. MapPoint Web Service delivered the solution.

“Businesses can customize data sets as part of MapPoint Web Service,” said Hyde. “If a location is not geocoded properly, a tool allows a new ‘push pin’ to be placed to generate the exact location when queried.”

Future location-dependent website capabilities are easy to implement and have huge associated visitor value

“One of the statewide initiatives is 511 service — real-time emergency, accident and road closure information,” Hyde said. “We hope to add this new website capability in the next 12 months. Of course MapPoint Web Service will play a vital role displaying maps and alternate route information on demand.”

A rest area Wi-Fi system is also part of future plans. It will be integrated with Vermont’s existing visitor information kiosks to provide paid Internet access and free tourism location information around the clock.

Other new MapPoint Web Service-enabled services will soon be offered.

“One of our most exciting upcoming capabilities will be the addition of travel itineraries,” said Hyde. “Website visitors can identify, secure and customize locations and routes for a whole vacation’s worth of activities – lodging, food, recreation and events.”

Calls to visitor help center drop by 24 percent

Over the last year, Vermont’s Department of Tourism and Marketing has seen a dramatic drop in live-operator-assisted calls largely due to its robust website.

“Calls for detailed location and direction information are down 24 percent,” said Hyde. “We’ve saved thousands of dollars and gained room to grow without adding personnel.”

The location component will be a key ingredient in Vermont’s Human Services Department

Beyond the Department of Tourism and Marketing, the state of Vermont sees other possibilities for MapPoint Web Service in its Human Services area.

“We hope to extend the power of MapPoint Web Service to streamline the finding, for example, doctors who take Medicaid patients or the location of a nearby obstetrician for a newborn,” said Hyde. “It’s all about providing better services for our residents while reducing associated costs.”

.NET infrastructure investment extended

“Building on Vermont’s existing Microsoft .NET infrastructure investment, we were able to more easily create a customized location solution for the Department of Tourism and Marketing,” said Melissa Dever, vice president of engineering, Competitive Computing. “Using such standards as SOAP and XML, MapPoint Web Service puts location solutions within easy grasp of virtually any developer, without the need to expand specific GIS or mapping knowledge.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about products and services, call or visit the Web site at: <http://www.vermontvacation.com>

For more information about Competitive Computing products and services, call 802.764.1700 or visit the Web site at: <http://www.competitive.com>

Microsoft MapPoint System

The Microsoft MapPoint System is an integrated set of products and services that provide end-to-end mapping and location solutions that help businesses grow revenue and reduce expenses. By enabling customers to locate and track key business assets, as well as more effectively analyze business data, the MapPoint System helps customers improve business results, optimize business processes, and enhance business decisions.

For more information about Microsoft MapPoint, go to: <http://www.microsoft.com/mappoint>
Or send e-mail to: maplic@microsoft.com

Software and Services

■ Products

- Microsoft .NET Framework
- Microsoft® MapPoint® Web Service

© 2004 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. This case study is for informational purposes only. MICROSOFT MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, IN THIS SUMMARY. Microsoft, Example: Active Directory, Windows, the Windows logo, Windows Server, and Windows Server System are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The names of actual companies and products mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners.

Document published November, 2004

Microsoft®