NCPTT Grant MT-2210-12-NC-09

June 7, 2013

Final Report -
Enhancements to What's Out There for Mobile Devices

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Executive Summary

In May 2013, The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) launched a new interface for tclf.org, the organization's primary vehicle for communication. The new interface, optimized to work with the small screens of iPhones and other handheld devices, includes specially designed pages for What's Out There, Pioneers, and foundation-sponsored event listings. The interface also takes advantage of better integration with image content, which was formerly hosted on Flickr, and with content from the Oral History series which is now being posted as individual segments on the website and on YouTube. The mobile interface also includes new functionality through What's Nearby, which identifies a user's current location using GPS technology and indicates what landscapes are within a 25 mile radius.

Introduction

In October 2009, The Cultural Landscape Foundation launched What's Out There (WOT), the nation's first and most comprehensive database of historic designed landscapes. The National Center for Preservation Training and Technology (NCPTT) and the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation were instrumental in establishing WOT, which has grown to over 1,350 individual landscapes, more than 9,000 supporting visual images, and over 650 designer profiles. During the past three years the program has also expanded to include: state-wide comprehensive documentation efforts (in Maine, Virginia, and Texas); university partnerships with faculty and students creating WOT content (at Louisiana State University, Columbia University, University of Washington, and University of Virginia); and What's Out There Weekends, highlighting significant historic landscapes through free tours led by expert guides at dozens of sites in each city - Washington DC, Chicago, San Francisco, New York, and Philadelphia to date.

In 2011, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts Art Works program and the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, TCLF launched enhanced mapping technology for WOT, which allows website users to conduct refined searches based on city, state, zip code, and distance. This new technology was a first step towards making our nation's legacy of historic designed landscapes visible to a wider audience, providing tools for visitors to explore landscapes at a glance or in depth by revealing the sites in their own neighborhood or the places they visit.

The mapping component led TCLF to focus on hand-held devices as a next step. Our Google Analytics point to ever-increasing traffic on tclf.org through mobile phones and iPads, an average of 250%

increase from 2010 to 2011 and at a similar rate since then. At the same time TCLF's What's Out There program has grown to appeal to a broader public audience than we have ever reached before. It is TCLF's most grassroots program, engaging people in their own communities and making connections across the country. TCLF's mission of *Stewardship through Education* is made real at events like What's Out There Weekend San Francisco, where visitors heard first-hand about the design process at Stern Grove from landscape architect Andrew Sullivan, who worked for Lawrence Halprin during the project's renovation, then visited Levi's Plaza and Ghirardelli Square on other tours. Thanks to WOT and the Weekend, they were able to see Halprin's work from different time periods across the city in a new light.

With this background, and with the ever-growing need to raise awareness about endangered historic (and particularly modernist) landscapes, TCLF launched into an exploration of what optimizing tclf.org for hand-held devices would entail.

Methods

In 2009, TCLF's launched its new website, tclf.org, and the What's Out There program on a Drupal content management system (CMS) designed by Message Agency. The platform allows TCLF staff to manage the site in-house and to streamline ongoing updates and site expansion. Drupal is a stable and flexible framework developed, tested, and refined, and has become one of the standards for open source CMS.

TCLF has continued to work with Message Agency, guided by Oviatt Media, since the website's inception. With the receipt of NCPTT's 2012 grant, TCLF was able to begin planning and design with Message Agency and Oviatt Media for the mobile interface for the website. The project was implemented in several stages.

DISCOVERY (June to August 2012)

The discovery phase of the project led to a solid project plan and revealed several platform constraints. Topics that were addressed and incorporated included:

- *Whether to do a separate "app" which could be downloaded to iPhones and other devices, or whether to design a mobile interface.* Due to the rich depth of content on tclf.org, we decided that a mobile interface was much more appropriate. It allows visitors to access the full content

of the website, while specific, high traffic sections were re-designed with a special interface that works well with small screens.

- *What components to highlight.* Google Analytics show that What's Out There is the highest traffic destination on the website, so it was an obvious component to include, along with the Pioneers section, which is tightly integrated with WOT. We also felt that it was important to highlight TCLF's events on the mobile interface, so that people can get access to and register for events more easily. We also decided to implement some strategies which would improve user access to images and to social media postings on both the main website and the mobile device interface.

    We investigated what was required to unbundle the Oral History modules and convert them to a mobile device-friendly program (i.e., change them from Flash). We discovered that tclf.org's current version of Drupal – version 6 – was not well suited to this sort of conversion, and so have put this part of the program aside for the next round of work, when we upgrade Drupal.

- *New content.* The traveling and mobile nature of hand-held devices made the need for a GPS-driven component essential to the project. We decided to create What's Nearby, which gives someone a list and map with sites that are within a 25-mile radius of their current location, based on GPS coordinates. We have also implemented the same concept for the main website, based on the computer's IP address.

INFORMATION DESIGN (September 2012 to March 2013)

Information design was organized into two parts – one project focused on the Flickr integration with the website, and the other focused on the mobile device interface and What's Nearby functionality.

The Flickr design required us to identify the content to be migrated (almost 9000 images), the fields that needed to be updated on each image (site name, city, and state), and the way we wanted that information to look on the website. TCLF staff completed much of the prep work, with Message Agency designing the framework for the images and interface for seeing them in the website.

The mobile device interface and What's Nearby functionality were a much more complex operation to design, and required a great deal more coordination and discussion to establish the look and feel and specific information to be included. The design process was a collaborative one, with Oviatt Media

taking the lead on style and appearance issues with input from TCLF staff, and Message Agency determining how to implement the various components within Drupal. One important consideration in the design of the interface was its ability to take on new types of content in the future, including the Oral History modules and other TCLF core content. Implementing the new version of Drupal on the main website will enable us to expand the functionality of the mobile interface as well.

PROGRAM ROLLOUT (December 2012; April to May 2013)

The Flickr implementation was completed first, independent of the mobile device and What's Nearby rollout. It was launched at the end of December 2012, and required a fairly simple and seamless transportation of data from Flickr to the Drupal website.

The mobile device interface and What's Nearby rollout happened on a test server initially, so that Oviatt Media and TCLF could be sure that everything looked and worked the way we thought it should. A few adjustments were made, and the both pieces were launched in early May with a minimum of website downtime and disruption.

Results and Discussion

The end result of the "Enhancements to What's Out There for Mobile Devices" project is a straightforward and seamless interface for TCLF's rich content in What's Out There, Pioneers, and Events, a new GPS-based function which identifies what historic landscapes are nearby, and a better way to connect to images and social media from a hand-held device. The product serves the purpose we intended, which is make the content more accessible and appealing to a wider audience. TCLF's core audience can certainly benefit from this easier access to WOT and other content, but we hope that the What's Nearby feature in particular can be a gateway for people who are interested in their communities and the designed environment around them but may not know "What's Out There." By helping them find it, we can encourage greater stewardship of resources in local communities and help protect endangered landscapes across the country and in our own back yards.

Word is just now getting out about the new mobile device interface. A story was featured in the American Society of Landscape Architecture's e-newsletter in late May and in TCLF's own June newsletter well, and the functionality will be a feature in all TCLF's upcoming events. We also have several feature stories in the work with travel-oriented magazines which will be released in the coming

months. And as our database grows through specific partnerships, we will be honing our marketing to tourist bureaus and other groups who can help spread the word to a more diverse audience.

Conclusions

In conclusion, TCLF is delighted to be able to offer a new and simplified interface to some of our most popular core programs and a GPS-driven program which provides website visitors with a whole new way of seeing the landscapes around them. What's Out There is a powerful tool for people to understand historic designed landscapes and their context. Enhancing the user experience through better mobile device technology teaches people about the places in their own backyard or on the road, which can lead to better protection for fragile and at-risk landscapes - achieving TCLF's mission of *Stewardship through Education*.

Acknowledgments

The work to conceive, design and implement "Enhancements to What's Out There for Mobile Devices" would not have been possible without the financial support of NCPTT and the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation. The thoughtful partnership and intellectual capacity of Message Agency and Oviatt Media were also instrumental in the success of the program's launch.

References

N/A