The Beauty of Bits and Bots: Getting Technology into Our Outdoor Recreation Act

Our Outdoor Recreation Economy
Trends and Opportunities for our Region’s People, Communities and Landscape
2018 Northern Forest Forest Regional Symposium
The Upper Valley Trails Alliance is the primary coordinator of Trail Finder (trailfinder.info).

UVTA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has been advocating for the maintenance, use, and development of trails since 1999.
What geography/population/recreation population does our story cover?

- **Geography:** Trail Finder (TF) focuses on NH and VT.

- **Primary population:** Visitors to and residents of NH and VT.

- **Secondary population:** Trail managers who are looking for ways to share information about their trails (not only where those trails are, but what to expect before users get there).
What are the top three things we should know about the target population?

- Common problem: When looking for a place to recreate close to home or when visiting a new area and not knowing what trail resources are available.

- It is challenging to know what content to trust on the Internet when so much is posted by those with partial understanding or without permission.

- Not all landowners and trail managers have the resources or ability to promote and market their trails (and organizations).
What was the situation at the start of our story that catalyzed our action?

- Broad-based interest in promoting trails, especially non-motorized (motorized coming on board slowly).

- Partial, outdated, limited, hard to find, sometimes conflicting information about trails.

- User expectations for fast, easy access to information via the Internet.
What has UVTA done to address the situation?

- Articulated the need.
- Built collaborative.
- Engaged trail managers.
- Implemented web-based solution.
- Promotions/outreach.
Anatomy of a Trail Posting

Features of a Trail Page

A Trail Overview: Provides a concise description of the trail's key features along with a thumbnail photograph. These appear on Trail Finder's search page.

B Quick Facts: Presents basic “statistics” about the trail, some of which can be queried from the search page.

C Download Data: Enables users to download map data in both KML and GPX formats.

D Current Weather: Provides a look at the current weather conditions in the vicinity of the trail, provided by Weather Underground.

E Nearby Geocaches: Links to geocaching.com where registered users can browse for geocache sites on an interactive map keyed to the same location as the trail.

F Leave No Trace Principle: Shows rotating suggestions on how to minimize impacts on the environment and other users.

G Connect on Facebook: Facebook widget showing Upper Valley Trails Alliance followers.

H Interactive Base Map: Depicts the trail and key points of interest directly on an interactive Google Map. Users can move around the map, toggle map backgrounds, and zoom in or out for more or less detail.

I Legend: Provides a key to the map's point symbols and trail lines. Users can toggle points on/off the map and highlight trail features.

J View Connector Trails: Options to view trails that connect with Winooski Nature Trail.

K There are Trail Alerts in effect: Information on current trail conditions and alerts.
What has happened as a result?

- People are learning about opportunities to be active outdoors.
- Trail managers have new voice.
- Trail stakeholder groups have access to a new resource and don’t have to reinvent the wheel when wanting to promote trails to their constituencies.
- Comprehensive GIS data being generated and used in other planning arenas.
Trail Finder Promotion

Find local trails across New Hampshire & Vermont
Explore new places
Connect with nature
Promote your trails & conservation work
Testimonial from a Trail Finder user:

“I want to compliment you on Trail Finder. I live in Hartland, VT. We have family members who come visit us from southern NE, and we often want to find new places to take them. Or they want to go exploring on their own.

We found Trail Finder and have loved it. We have learned of new places near our home, and we have shown our family members Trail Finder. They can then go explore trails on their own – knowing how to get there and what to expect.

Thank you for this great service. It has been wonderful for us and our extended family.”
What did it take to do this?

- The right team (think partnerships).
- Partners must be capable of understanding how trails + technology + audience + working with volunteers all intersect.
- A robust RFP process for developing the website.
Trail Finder Partners
What was our toughest challenge and how did we handle it?

- Rich, robust content development can take time...the start to finish process for posting a trail system to TF is time consuming.

- Trail Finder is one of many things that we do (and that our trail managers do).

- Fundraising for present and future – From site development and maintenance funding to funds to support future trail postings to communicating with Trail Managers.
trailFINDER

Get Out.
Get Active.
Explore...
What is our best advice?

- Not a go-it-alone project – creative partnerships are essential for this kind of initiative.

- Plan for long-term...trail maps on the web are a different beast than printed materials and need to be seen as a long-term investment.

- Focus on adding content before fully promoting the site.
For more information, please contact:
Russell Hirschler
(802) 649-9075
russell.hirschler@uvtrails.org