Abstract

Great Lakes of Georgia Project Promotes Tourism Using ArcWeb Services

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Track: ArcWeb Services

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The website will also capture user/demographic information and website statistical data that can be easily accessed and exported to usable format for other marketing efforts. There are 21 partner agencies, including local chambers, Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs), and Georgia State Parks, that will receive information requests, requests for reservations, and be responsible for updating the website content (i.e. local business, attractions, event locations and online specials) for their respective section. An interactive online mapping solution, based on ESRI ArcWeb Services, will provide maps, driving directions, and routing for locations around the lakes and the featured listing in the business directory.

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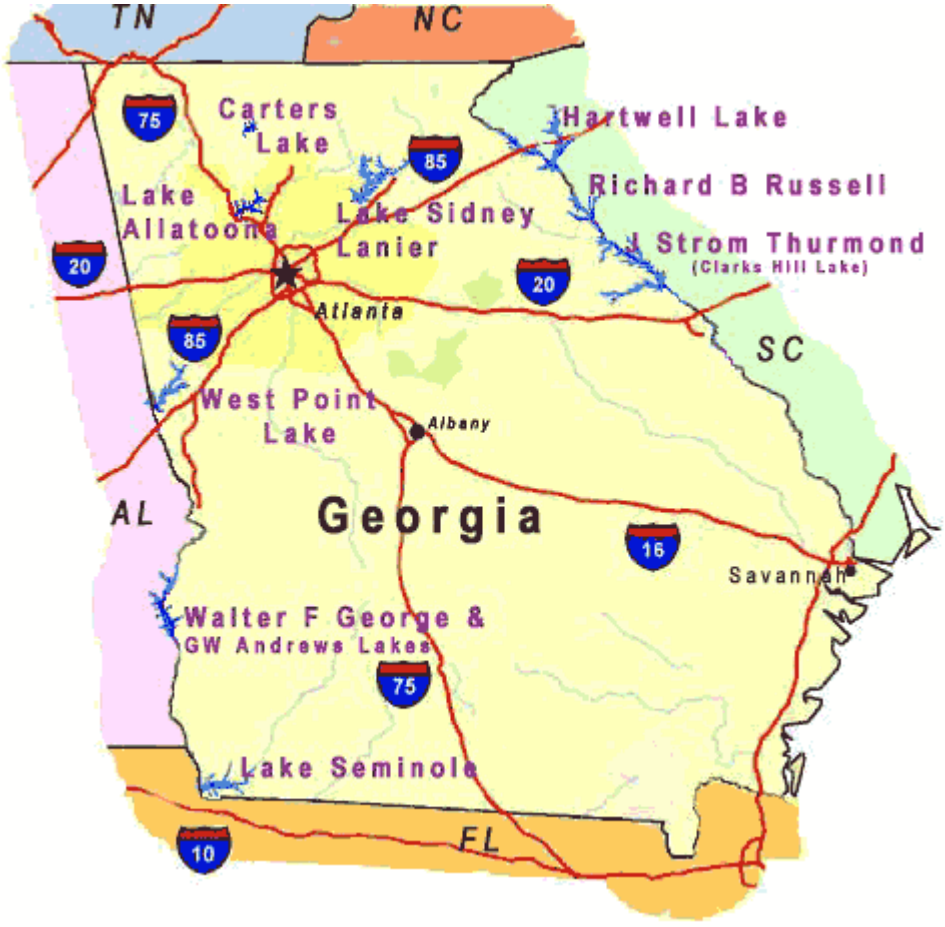
Introduction

The Gainesville-Hall County Convention and Visitors Bureau, with support from various federal, state, and local organizations, developed a marketing campaign to promote the nine U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes in Georgia. The campaign's main component was a website equipped to inform visitors about each lake's location, recreational opportunities, and surrounding businesses. To make the site more beneficial to users, a mapping component developed by Dymapic Technologies, was added to the site. The component, which accesses GIS data using ArcXML and .NET technology, allows users to create custom maps from their home or origination point to the selected lake or business.



The nine lakes extend over 244,102 acres of land, 280,638 acres of water, and have a combined total of 4,724 miles of shoreline.

Within those acres, there are 489 recreation areas that include 5,849 picnic sites, 7,008 campsites, 184 beaches, 202 miles of hiking trails, 41 fishing docks, 430 boat ramps, and 38 marinas with more than 16,000 boat slips. Additionally, there are ten state parks located around Georgia's U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes. Annual visitation to these state parks is nearly 2.5 million.

Equally immense as the geographic size and recreational opportunities of the lakes is their economic impact. The lakes attract more than 38.5 million visitors every year, with approximately 4% of those visitors staying overnight. These visitors have an enormous economic impact on the surrounding communities. Recent U.S. Corps of Engineers statistics show the annual amount spent by lake visitors at these and other businesses to be $672 million (not including purchases for durable goods). Sixty-five percent of this spending is captured as direct sales. With multiplier effects, visitor spending results in $716 million in total sales, $388 million in total income, and 17,364 jobs in communities within 30 miles of a U.S. Corps of Engineers' lake.

To support the large number of visitors, various types of support businesses have developed around the lake areas. The businesses include golf courses, resorts, sailing and yacht clubs, bait shops, convenience stores, marinas, fishing guides, boat sales and rental companies, and numerous restaurants and shopping opportunities. The fishing tournament business on U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes is documented by thousands of permits annually.

The Problem

The economic impact of the nine U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes is immense. However, the Georgia tourism industry does not recognize the lake's impact, mainly because the lakes are not as heavily marketed as other recreational tourism products.

The lack of marketing for the lakes is mainly due to lack of funding. The U.S. Corps of Engineers have no advertising dollars, and many of the counties surrounding the lakes are small tier 1 and 2 counties who do not have the resources to market or advertise the lakes individually. The marketing that does exist is often scattered and does not provide consumers with comprehensive information of the lakes, surrounding special events, and businesses.

Since the lakes produce such a large economic impact throughout the state, and numerous attractions and small businesses are dependent on the recreational industry surrounding the lakes, various local and state organizations began investigating ways to maximize their economic potential.

The Plan

The marketing initiative was led and administered by the Gainesville-Hall County CVB. The Great Lakes of Georgia planning committee included the Gainesville-Hall County CVB, the Cumming-Forsyth Chamber of Commerce, Augusta Metropolitan CVB, the Cartersville-Bartow CVB, Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. The planning committee first outlined the marketing plan to promote the U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes. The plan consisted of a comprehensive series of marketing initiatives, including tourism targeted advertising, printed informational brochures, and a detailed website focusing on the U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes and their offerings. Once the marketing plan was outlined, the planning committee searched for ways to fund the campaign.

The planning committee presented their plan to other state and local groups and created a partnership with two dozen local CVBs and Chambers of Commerce that surround the nine U.S. Army Corp of Engineers' lakes, as well as support from the Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and State Parks. Together, the group was able to appropriate the $80,000 needed to fund the campaign through state grants and private funds.

The on-going goal of the project is to increase the overnight and day-use visitation to the lodging facilities and campgrounds surrounding the U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes. The planning committee has projected that their marketing campaign will increase overnight visitation by 1%, or 14,400 new visitors. It is estimated that the 14,400 new visitors would spend approximately $58.73 a visit; which should result in an **$845,712** increase in direct trip spending for overnight visitors. Day-use visitors are projected to increase by .001%, or 34,600 visitors; which would have an estimated daily impact of $46.74. This would result in a **$1,617,204** increase in direct trip spending. The first year total projected increase in direct trip spending for the additional projected **49,000** day-use and overnight visitors is **$2,462,916.**

The Website

When the Great Lakes of Georgia's marketing plan was developed, organizers intended the website to serve as its main component by providing users with a single information resource for those interested in visiting the Corps of Engineer lakes, adjacent parks and attractions. Located at www.GreatLakesofGeorgia.com, the website provides a home page for each lake that details its recreational opportunities and driving direction to nearby businesses. In addition, a database of resources was incorporated into the website's architecture to provide up-to-date specials and event information for visitors. An administration area was developed for each CVB as a way for the content to be kept current, to add commercial sponsors, and to monitor website statistics.

The database includes more than 2,000 entries for categories such as boating, fishing, lodging, camping, golf, resorts, attractions, marinas, restaurants, and parks. By developing the database as a public-private venture, organizers were able to offer a limited number of enhanced listings for commercial sponsors. For a fee, commercial sponsors are able to highlight their company information in the appropriate category including company name, address, phone number, email, and website links. An additional benefit of being a commercial sponsor is to have a mapping component added to the enhanced listing. As revenue is collected from private business it will be added to the advertising campaign.

Mapping Component

The U.S. Corps of Engineers' lakes are spread out across Georgia, which made finding the lakes an issue for Georgia residents as well as out-of-state visitors. The wide geographic variance, coupled with the fact that there was not one central information resource for people interested in visiting these recreational lakes, forced organizers to investigate ways to help visitors easily plan vacations and fishing trips.

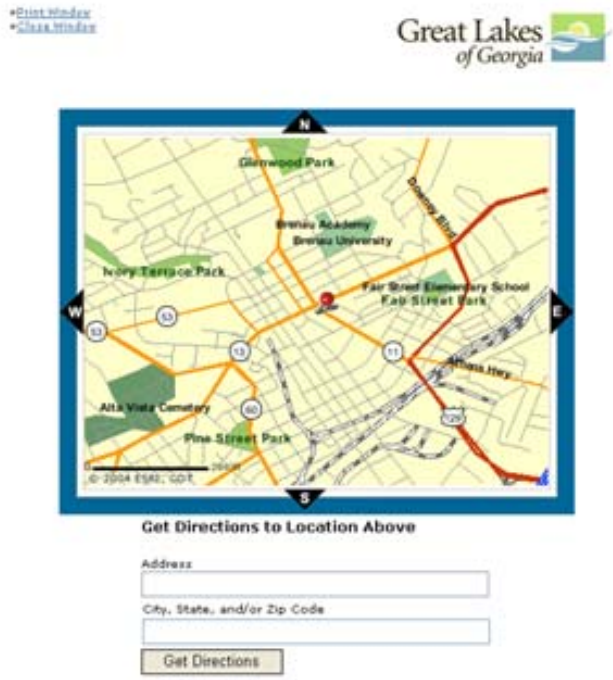
After talking with their website developers, Red Clay Interactive, the Great Lakes of Georgia planning committee learned that most mapping services are static, location-based components that are cost-prohibitive, ranging anywhere from $6,000 - $25,000 and above. Users must purchase a large number of map transactions at the beginning of each year that are lost if not used. Then, they must pay the same amount for the next year. Additionally, managing the integration and hosting needs of these mapping applications requires detailed programming skills only found in a knowledgeable IT staff.
As an alternative, the planning committee was introduced to Dymapic Technologies. Dymapic Technologies had developed a dynamic, web-based mapping application (NAVIGATOR™) that accessed geographic data through web services and had a system that provided no-hassle integration with current websites. Also, once the application was integrated into a web site, Dymapic

Technologies continued ongoing management. The application is managed in a hardened, enterprise-level facility with a dedicated server. It accesses the most current GIS information from servers maintained by ESRI.

Visitors are able to create personalized driving directions from their origination point to a featured business on one of the nine U.S. Corp of Engineers' lakes. Maps can also be generated with highlighted routes and driving directions to multiple locations around the lakes, allowing lake visitors to easily locate featured business, as well as state parks, and boat ramps. The maps are viewed on screen or can be printed. Additional information is also available, such as names of locations, phone and fax numbers, site descriptions, and web links.

The Great Lakes of Georgia planning committee felt that this application was an excellent choice for their current marketing plan because it did not require their staff to perform any type of software installation, or be involved in the management or hosting of the mapping component. It would also help accomplish the overall marketing goals at an affordable price. NAVIGATOR™ cost 50% less than the other mapping applications they reviewed, and it had map transactions that did not expire for two years.

Implementation of ArcWeb Services



NAVIGATOR™ was determined to be the most suitable option for the Great Lakes of Georgia project and was quickly integrated into their existing website. The maps are accessed directly from each lake's featured listing and are customized to the design of the Great Lakes of Georgia's website. This maintains visual consistency and does not appear to the visitor as being redirected to another website. The interface is also simple and intuitive to use.

Results

The Great Lakes of Georgia website was launched in January 2004. Since the launch, the number of visitors has doubled each month, with an overall total of more than 5,500 total unique visitors.

While it is too soon to determine the economic impact the website and mapping component are having on lake tourism, organizers feel the continuing increase in traffic is indicative of future results.

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