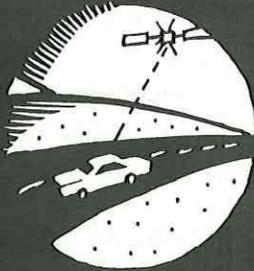


TECHBRIEF



The national Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) program includes the development and application of advanced systems upon all parts of the transportation network, including rural areas. The U.S. DOT has developed the Advanced Rural Transportation Systems (ARTS) program to meet the needs of travelers in and through rural areas, as well as the agencies responsible for the operation and maintenance of the rural transportation system. The ARTS program complements the ITS efforts in metropolitan areas and commercial vehicle operations (CVO) by studying ways to best implement technologies that address transportation problems in rural areas.



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AZ TripUSA™

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Background

Northern Arizona has more than 6 million visitors per year. More than 2 million of these visitors will explore the World Wide Web to learn more about their destination prior to their trip. For this reason, the Federal Highway Administration, in partnership with the Arizona Department of Transportation (DOT), sponsored the development of the AZ TripUSA™ Rural Model Deployment Initiative (MDI)/Field Operation Test (FOT) in Northern Arizona along I-40. The result was TripUSA™ (developed by Castle Rock Consultants). This program is a public/private partnership created to improve traveler mobility, enhance economic development for the area, and enrich the overall experience of travelers.

AZ TripUSA™ was successfully deployed during the first 6 months of 1998. TripUSA™ allows travelers who use the Internet to discover a wealth of information about their destination for use in trip and travel planning. Upon arriving at their destination, travelers can use interactive touch-screen kiosks to check road and weather conditions, find lodging and restaurants, and obtain directions to attractions.

Capabilities

Website: The home page for AZ TripUSA™ allows easy access to regional as well as area-wide information. This site can be viewed on the Web at www.arizona.tripusa.com. After selecting an area on the map on the home page, users are taken to a regional page. "Advertorials" (a more descriptive advertisement) on the regional pages encourage users to visit selected sites. Other options include lodging, restaurants, travel conditions (including links to the Arizona DOT Highway Condition Reporting System), attractions, and general information.

Marketing Plan and Website Promotion: A marketing plan was developed that provided a road map for public relations and sales efforts, including website promotion, methods for capturing advertising and web page development revenue sources, and kiosk installation strategies. AZ TripUSA™ was officially launched in June 1998. Within the first

2 months, more than 50,000 page views and 6,000 individual visitors were counted. Initial site visitation and continued growth in usage have been accomplished through a variety of promotional activities, including:

- Submission to numerous search engines, including those used by international tourists.
- Press releases, including the initial site announcement to 1,200 publications.
- Sharing of links with highly visited sites, including DOTs, Offices of Tourism, and sites for which we are providing free links.
- Discreet mentioning of the site in Internet news groups dedicated to tourism.
- Advertising in various tourist guides.

Advertising Development: A unique advertising strategy employing advertorials was created. Advertorials allow the customer more space to describe their product than traditional banner advertisements and they stimulate greater "click-through" rates than the 1 percent typical of banners. To garner additional advertorial revenues, a custom brochure has been developed for use in direct mail campaigns. National banner advertisements

are provided by an outside advertising agency. Affinity programs are also being tested. These programs pay commissions to TripUSA™ when users make online hotel or flight reservations or purchase books, magazines, or other items.

Kiosks: Kiosks allow for free access to all of the information on TripUSA™. In addition, users can check their e-mail, surf the Web, or use America Online for 25 cents/min using cash or credit cards. Three types of kiosks are available to hosts: sit-down or stand-up units, or a stand-alone (counter-top) terminal for use where space is limited. Six initial units have been installed in Arizona and are operating successfully. Many additional sites have expressed an interest in hosting kiosks.

Funding Source: AZ TripUSA™ is self-sustaining. No additional public funding beyond the initial first-year subsidy was required for continued operation and expansion. Funding for maintenance and ongoing enhancement of the websites is derived from local businesses. Hotels, restaurants, and other area businesses have made use of Castle Rock's custom web page development services, and are paying for banner advertising and advertorials that aid in attracting users to their location. Local advertising is supplemented by advertisements from national sponsors. The interactive kiosks

are supported through money deposited in the kiosks by travelers who wish to send or receive e-mail or surf the Web. This combination of paid access and free use is modeled after pay telephones (i.e., dialing 911 will give free access to emergency services when needed, but the pay telephone is supported at locations around the world based on paid usage).

Future Vision: AZ TripUSA™'s greater vision is no less than a continent-wide, cost-effective, seamless, and commercially profitable travel, tourism, and weather information system that enhances safety and facilitates travel throughout North America. To realize our aims of full financial viability and early profitability, we know we must achieve this vision within 3 to 5 years.

Project Sponsor

Federal Highway Administration and the Arizona Department of Transportation.

Partner

Castle Rock Consultants

For more information

Contact Tim Penney, Office of Safety Research and Development, Federal Highway Administration, 6300 Georgetown Pike, McLean, VA 22101-2296, (202) 493-3368.