# Virginia Park Visitors Find Their Way With Kiosks



As Fred Lochner and his family rounded mile five on a Wisconsin horseback trail, the sky above him began to get dark and the wind picked up. A thunderstorm was imminent. Lochner, an avid outdoorsman, pulled out a shoddy map of the park, but because of the map's poor quality had trouble finding his way to the lodge. His family did make it back eventually, but needless to say, they were soaking wet.

From that experience, Lochner, founder of Imperial Multimedia, developed the idea for a park kiosk that would allow users to print maps and get trail information. The result was a rollout of Information Stations, which were deployed in Virginia State Parks earlier this year.

The Virginia State Parks have more than seven million visitors each year and have over 500 miles of trails.  The kiosks are free and provide interactive information about those trails as well as activities and park amenities. They also allow visitors to print park maps and wildlife guides right. Users even have access to video of park destinations to help them decide where to plan their trip.

Trail information is GIS (Global Information System) –based, which means users have access to satellite and topographic maps, as well as standard trail maps. Maps are marked with thousands of GPS waypoints that Lochner said can guide users around the park, and hopefully keep people from getting stuck in thunderstorms.

"The kiosks are actually very green," Lochner said. "Typically there is a hinged box that holds all the maps and people just take a handful. When they realize someone else in their group already has the map or they grabbed too many, the paper goes in the trash. With the kiosk they only print off the maps they need."

The maps are printed on eight-inch thermal printers from Telpar. The printers are equipped with an auto-retract feature that sucks the paper back into the machine if no one takes the map after a certain amount of time. Lochner said customers notice and really like that feature.

## Information Station features

- **5,000 pictures**
- **Five hours of video content**
- **Topographic and shaded relief maps**
- **Aerial imagery of 31 State Parks**
- **Virtual tours and GPS waypoints for 500 of trails**
- **Directory of local amenities and attractions**

The kiosks are equipped with infrared touchscreens, which  provide the best protection from vandalism and the elements, Lochner said. A Pentium 4 computer with a high-powered graphics card powers the kiosks. There are embedded solid-state air conditioners that regulate temperature and humidity.

"I was working on a unit in the summer when the heat index was 115 degrees," Lochner said. "The kiosk was still printing maps."

### Local involvement

The kiosks are also designed to help the park personnel as well as park visitors. Typically the park rangers are the ones having to answer wayfinding questions. Lochner said people were also asking park staff questions about amenities surrounding the park, such as restaurants, lodging and even movie theatres.

The local business involvement is part of Imperial Multimedia's plan to boost economic development in the area through the Information Stations. Financially, the kiosks are maintained by local support from area businesses in the form of permission-based advertising. For example, if a user wants to find a hotel nearby they have access to a list of local hotels, all of which who helped sponsor the kiosks.

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"Sometimes people don't want to grill hot dogs over the fire every night and don't know what else is around the park," Lochner said. "My kids wanted pizza and a movie one night when we were staying at a Virginia park."

The project was originally funded by local private partners. The Dominion Foundation donated $300,000 to get the project started in Virginia. Lochner said that Dominion has a history of being very supportive of parks and that their employees have built footbridges and amphitheatres at parks in the past. Local power company Appalachian Power also donated a significant amount of money for the kiosk launch.



*A screen shot from the Virginia State Parks kiosks. The kiosks are feautred in 31 State Parks.*

In the development stage, Imperial commissioned acquisition teams to hike all 500 miles of trail in the Virginia State Parks to find information for the kiosk content. Some Imperial employees were on the teams, but they also tapped several Eagle Scouts from the University of Virginia who had photography and wilderness experience. The teams marked GPS waypoints on the trails, took photos of wildlife in certain areas and documented areas of interest both on paper and on video.

The Information Stations were first deployed as part of a 2003 test pilot project in Wisconsin, home of Imperial Multimedia. Imperial ran a three-year pilot in the Wisconsin State Parks. Like the current financing situation in Virginia, the Wisconsin test pilot was underwritten by local sponsors who received permission-based advertising.
That same year, Imperial showed the kiosk at National Park Directors Convention where the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation picked up on the concept.

Currently, Lochner and Imperial are working with the DCR to expand the deployment. The original agreement was to have 31 kiosks in place by the end of 2007. Imperial has already surpassed that number and is now adding multiple kiosks per park.

Lochner said that the kiosks' red and white theme will stay the same across all deployments in an effort to build a brand identity.

Imperial is continuing to extend its park kiosk services by developing projects with kayak tour and outfitting companies and wildlife refuges.

"One refuge we're working with is remote access only," Lochner said. "People hike or canoe there and bam—there's a kiosk right there in the middle of nowhere."

Source:

**www.selfservice.org/article_3139_23.php**

http://www.vaparks.net/kiosk.html

### About Telpar

Telpar is a recognized leader in the design, manufacture and support of OEM and kiosk printers Additionally is a leading distributor of Epson, Fujitsu, APS and Citizen print mechanism and control boards. Telpar printers are popularly used by Kiosk manufacturers, medical equipment manufacturers, ATM manufacturers, gaming, and petroleum equipment manufacturers, engineering and instrumentation applications.  .

Among these offerings, is the Stealth family of printers. These high-speed direct thermal printers are available in 2, 3, 4 and 8.5 inch document widths and use Telpar`s designs to provide the most complete set of features available for a Kiosk printer.

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