IN THIS CASE STUDY YOU WILL LEARN:

1. How an existing 511 website was brought up to current web design standards in order to continue to meet the growing demand for the real-time traffic and travel information.

2. How the updates provide access to New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and the New Jersey (NJ) Turnpike traffic monitoring cameras on Windows and Mac operating systems, as well as Apple and Android devices.

3. How the new website has been designed with the capability to adapt and transform as the demand and methodology used by visitors to access traffic and traveler information changes over the next several years.

BACKGROUND

On July 21, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designated 511 as the single travel information telephone number to be made available to states and local jurisdictions across the country. In 2005, the United States Congress passed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA- LU). It included Section 1201, which was a provision for states to develop a Real-Time System Management Information Program. The purpose of the Real-Time System Management Information Program was to provide states with the capability to monitor, in real-time, the traffic and travel conditions of the major highways across the U.S. and provide a means of sharing data with state and local governments and with the traveling public. These two directives converged, and in 2010, the New Jersey Department of Transportation launched its 511 Traffic and Traveler Information website.

Since then, the 511NJ.org website has provided traffic and travel information for over 10 million travelers and has been a national model for sharing data with state and local governments, law enforcement, first responders, and most importantly, the traveling public throughout the NY/NJ/CT region. Technology has changed significantly in the past nine years. The original website was built, in part, using Adobe Flash that has reached its end of life. Therefore, the website needed to be brought up to current web design standards in order to continue to meet the growing demand for the real-time traffic and travel information that the 511 NJ website provides.

TSMO PLANNING, STRATEGIES, AND DEPLOYMENT

The July 2019 re-launch marked the first time the 511NJ.org website has seen any significant enhancements since the original deployment. Prior to the re-deployment, website visitors who used Mac-based computers, including iPhones, iPads and Safari, could not access all areas of the website, including the traffic monitoring cameras. Now, using industry standard website development tools, like HTML 5, the website can be accessed in a mobile browser, with auto-detection, and video capabilities available to all devices, including Android, and Apple.
“With the Department’s re-deployment of the 511nj.org website, visitors can now see NJDOT and the NJ Turnpike traffic monitoring cameras, when available, on Windows and Mac operating systems, as well as, Apple and Android devices,” according to Commissioner Diane Gutierrez - Scaccetti. “The Department understands that the way the public accesses traffic and travel information has changed, and we are happy to be able to seamlessly deliver this valuable information to the public, regardless of the type of device being used to request information.” The new 511nj.org website is mobile-friendly as well. Visitors can simply launch the website using a mobile browser, from any handheld device or tablet, and the system will automatically recognize that individuals are using a mobile device and it will automatically customize and maximize the information into a mobile-friendly layout.

The refreshed website now plays a critical role in TSMO planning and strategies. A new feature of the website is the interactive “Camera” Widget. Operations Center staff can now place up to 10 cameras in the Widget that can show images from cameras near, or, in the vicinity of an incident or event. Whether it is a long-term “Mega” construction project, football game, or a weather event that impacts the entire region, cameras from both the department, as well as the NJ Turnpike Authority, can be added to the Widget to provide the motoring public, first responders and law enforcement with a real-time view of what conditions are like on select roadways.

By standardizing the incident data, the same information is available across multiple platforms (web/phone/alerts). In addition, NJDOT also makes this available to the general public and other developers through RSS and Twitter feeds. Providing the public with real-time multimodal travel information on the 511nj.org website, affords visitors the unique opportunity to make smart travel decisions before heading out on the state's highways. During the summer, the popular routes to the shore are added to the website in an effort to better serve the public. The department has also incorporated data from its transportation partners to provide real-time information about the status of the rail lines, buses, and light rail, in addition to the parking availability at regional airports. These features, combined with travel times and incident data from throughout the region, present the public with the unique opportunity to make travel decisions based on real-time data, before leaving from their home or office.

**COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND EXECUTION**

During peak travel periods like Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, and the Fourth of July, the department will remind travelers to allow extra time to get to their destinations. NJDOT also promotes visiting the 511NJ website for the latest real-time traffic conditions. There are also times when all the 511NJ services see a significant increase in usage. The department leveraged this knowledge and experience to promote the new 511NJ website during the 2019 Fourth of July holiday. A press release was issued, the new website promoted, and email notifications were sent to the Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Transportation Management Associations, and county and local governments through the department’s “Commitment to Communities” program. This let the public know about the new website so that they, in turn, could encourage users to provide feedback to the Department which would help to further enhance the website to meet the needs of the users. The following was included in the press release announcing the improved website.

“The 511nj.org website provides valuable real-time travel information about crashes, congestion construction, special events, and provides travel times,” said Commissioner Diane Gutierrez - Scaccetti. “The Department always encourages motorists to check the 511nj.org website for the most up-to-date travel information.”

**OUTCOMES, BENEFITS, AND LEARNINGS**

After the first month, it was clear that the enhancements to the website, combined with the communications and release plan resulted in a significant increase in 511NJ.org website traffic. A comparison of July 2018 to July 2019 statistics show an astonishing 175% increase in website users. After the second month, the department continued to see a significant increase in traffic to the 511NJ.org website. While the large spike in usage in July can be directly attributed to the promotional efforts, users are also interacting with the website to explore, and they are returning more frequently. NJDOT will continue to listen to the visitors that use the website and take their comments and input seriously. In order for the 511NJ.org website to maintain relevancy and to be a more effective TSMO tool, the department is paying much closer attention to feedback and comments that are being provided.

In September, several additional enhancements were implemented, including a full screen map to ensure legacy bookmarks directed users to the same pages, providing the ability to close unwanted tiles, and reset the home page defaults. The enhanced website is just one TSMO strategy that the department has to help reduce congestion on our state highways. Capitalizing on these incremental changes, the department will continue to ensure that it is providing users of the 511NJ.org website with the best experience possible. Lastly, the website has been designed with the capability to adapt and transform as the demand and methodology used by visitors to access traffic and traveler information changes over the next several years.