Modernizing Digital Interactions to Transform the Parks Experience

State parks must embrace comprehensive technology-driven solutions to integrate operations and delight visitors

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As parks and recreation professionals can confirm, the great outdoors is increasing in popularity. Even with rising competition for most everyone's attention—from work and family priorities to easier-than-ever access to online and televised entertainment—park attendance numbers have increased at many state parks across the U.S.

During fiscal 2017, the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) reported there were over 807 million visitors to U.S. state parks. To put this figure into perspective, that's more than double the entire population of the United States.[1]

Multiple states have reported rising attendance numbers. In Pennsylvania, for example, the state park system has seen an explosion of visitors. Attendance at the state's 121 parks grew from 36.8 million in 2011 to more than 40 million in 2016, according to state data.[2]

Crowds are also flocking to parks across Maryland, increasing the number of park visits by 40 percent from 2009, to 14.5 million visits in 2017. This uptick in visitors has also forced rangers to shut the gates at certain parks more than twice as often, from 54 times in 2009 to 122 times in 2017.[3]

And attendance at state parks across New York increased to 71.5 million visitors in 2017, up 950,000 from the previous year.[4]

While increasing park attendance is a positive result, it also poses a daunting challenge for many state park administrators, especially given the growing number of visitors who have fully embraced our digital age. In 2018, more than nine-in-ten Millennials (92%) own smartphones, along with 85% of Gen Xers (aged 38 to 53). This demographic wants to digitally interact with the agencies managing parks, and they are often frustrated at the lack of technology offered by parks departments.[5]

At the heart of the challenge is the need to juggle the management of dwindling state park budgetary resources, while somehow meeting demand for digital connectivity, and operating within park capacity requirements.

How can state park professionals provide the best service to as many visitors as possible, without stretching the state's limited resources to the breaking point? How can resources be maximized and underutilized sites be discovered? In this high-demand environment, how can state park administrators deliver a fun and memorable experience, from planning to packing up?

Seek Better Answers

State parks largely rely on legacy platforms that are not mobile friendly, and lack data analytics / business intelligence.

Worse yet, these antiquated systems are siloed – unconnected to other agency systems.

State park administrators need to embrace a more holistic approach to park management.

Current Challenges

For several years, the vast majority of state parks have outsourced camping reservations to third-party campground reservation vendors. According to the NASPD's 2018 Annual Information Exchange, there were more than 221,300 campsites and overnight camping opportunities in state park systems. For fiscal 2017, nearly 20 million campsite nights were rented, serving more than 57 million overnight visitors. [6]

Less than a handful of states still operate in-house systems or reserve campsites on a first-come-first-served basis and do not accept reservations. And for the most part, outsourced reservation services have yielded promising results. The right reservation system can provide a streamlined experience for anyone planning to visit a state park, enabling them to quickly find the information they need, secure and pay for camping space, and know they can count on their expectations to be met when they arrive on-site for their park visit.

But even these reservation systems have their limits. Many states operate legacy systems that are not mobile friendly, lack data analytics and business intelligence tools. Additionally, they often operate in a vacuum or silo, unconnected to other agency systems. Reservation information that isn't integrated across all state platforms makes it a struggle for agencies to deliver comprehensive reports needed for active management and budgeting. Siloed systems also come up short in enabling agencies to 'crunch the numbers' so they can gain analytic insights that benefit state park agencies and their patrons in a variety of exciting, forward-thinking ways.

Park visitors have certain expectations. For example, states increasingly realize camping now competes with other family tourism alternatives that invariably offer free Wi-Fi, which helps visitors stay connected when they are away from home and work. This is likely why many states are exploring ways to make Wi-Fi more of a utility rather than an amenity.

An improved digital ecosystem can transform every visitor's park experience. This is why it's essential to embrace a more inclusive, or holistic, approach to park management that includes integrated technologies.

Comprehensive Connectivity

Conduent's Smart Parks offering can connect and modernize state park operations and revenue collection processes using a technology-driven approach to address all aspects of a state park's digital ecosystem.

Conduent's Smart Parks

At state parks today, the more visitors, the more technology can help. Many camping reservations platforms have outlived their usefulness. State park administrators need a more modern and comprehensive approach. Across the U.S., states are starting to think beyond simple reservations, to consider their digital ecosystem -- to assess the gaps that hinder their ability to manage a modern state park system in our digital age.

Conduent's Smart Parks offering integrates modern, intelligent state parks management solutions to optimize park operations and provide an array of convenient offerings for park patrons. Conduent can connect and modernize your state park operations and revenue collection systems using a comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of your park's digital ecosystem, including: campground reservations; parking fee collection; pass programs; tours; event registration; customer relationship management; data analytics; Wi-Fi connectivity; marinas; boat registrations and permits; golf operations; and other services.

Conduent's holistic approach can be used to connect all areas of park operations and revenue collection into a single data stream, to foster data-driven decision-making and performance metric management of state park resources. Conduent's Smart Parks solutions are web-based, device agnostic and independently configured so they can grow to meet each state park's operational goals.

Mobile First	Online transaction processing plaform	Automated parking solution	System Integration
Point of sale devices	Data warehouse and analytics	Tour ticketing	Decision-making dashboard
Training / learning management	Customer and internal technical support	Data security	Wireless infrastructure
Pass programs	Business intelligence	Modernized records management / image and back file conversion	

Think Like a Hotelier

With the right solutions in place, state parks can gain visibility across platforms and processes, along with analytic insights to help inform ongoing operational decisions.

Embrace Hospitality Advances

To help states modernize and integrate applications and services across all park operations, Conduent recommends they take advantage of advances initiated in the hospitality sector. By implementing a comprehensive, technology-driven approach to park management, state parks stand to gain the following:

Greater flexibility in scheduling and pricing – via the addition of yield management practices used in travel, hotel, airline and car rental services, state parks gain can use flexible rates, multiple defined rate levels and rate scheduling to support seasonal demand, and site improvement requirements.

Denial tracking – helps reservation specialists determine why potential visitors didn't book an overnight visit. Proper analysis of denials can help parks better manage rates or policies to increase future bookings.

Elimination of 'vendor lock-in' – so that state parks are not handcuffed to a single supplier for online reservation services and customers no longer must remember passwords to make a reservation.

The ability to implement rewards programs – these 'opt-in' programs for customers are similar to those provided by airlines and hotel chains.

Website integration – e-commerce, content management and customer relationship management (CRM) tools can help state parks improve event registration levels and program participation.

Digital event and tour registration – notifies past visitors of upcoming events and tours so they can easily register from their smartphones, to drive greater participation and generate revenue.

Integrated point of sale (POS) systems – reduce cash management requirements and create a data stream for reporting revenue to enhance performance management.

Business intelligence (BI) – to gain greater insight into revenue and assets, along with Google and Facebook analytics integration. BI can help states pull together multiple data streams and create dashboards that help park administrators make the case for funding.

Pay no license fees or annual maintenance fees – regardless of the number of users, state parks can utilize transaction fees or a percentage of sales to pay for much-needed technological transformation.

As your strategic partner, Conduent is standing by to help ensure that your new state park system is a resounding success.

View our Latest Video

Watch a short video to learn more about our Smart Parks offering at:

http://bit.ly/2Ds66pe

The Power of Partnership

To gain the benefits of a more holistic technological approach, states need a strategic partner to help them modernize internal and external operations. As a trusted and proven integrator for many state government agencies, Conduent delivers digital platforms and services that help manage millions of constituent interactions every day. We help elevate every interaction, driving modern, digital experiences that are more efficient, helpful and will exceed your state park customers' expectations.

Our Smart Parks solutions are designed to keep pace with your state's evolving digital requirements. By selecting Conduent, you gain a trusted, strategic partner and a single point of contact to help you transform the management of state park resources to better meet staff and customer expectations and demands.

For more information, visit **www.Conduent.com/parks** or reach out to us at **PublicServices@Conduent.com**.

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