A new way to enjoy the outdoors

Edinburgh Outdoors is a digital service launched in February 2013 providing a new way for locals and tourists to enjoy Edinburgh's parks and green spaces.

Edinburgh Outdoors comprises a website, mobile app, Facebook and Twitter account, and offers a wide range of information, from explanations of monuments and trees to park maps and the location of public facilities. The service is the first of its kind in Edinburgh; no other outlet provides this variety of information through such a range of channels.

Involving residents

Edinburgh Outdoors uses open data, with the main content provided by the city council. Citizens and local organisations have been heavily involved in the development of the service, and contribute local events, images and comments. The council holds regular meetings to gather input into what information they would most like to see. In particular, residents would like to find more information on local nature reserves, trees, woodland and wildlife. At an annual meeting, Edinburgh brings together 37 friends of parks organisations - who carry out work to improve local parks - to discuss ideas and report back on their work. These groups have been particularly receptive to the service as it has helped raise awareness and respect for the city's green areas.

Edinburgh Outdoors was developed with a view to encouraging residents and visitors to get out and enjoy its parks. By making information on trees, plants and monuments easily accessible, Edinburgh is raising awareness of its natural heritage. And with community events advertised via the service, it is encouraging residents to participate more actively in their neighbourhoods.

> " Edinburgh is widely recognised as having some of the most fantastic parks and green spaces. This innovative project will make use of the council's vast wealth of data and give park users access to it - allowing them to find out more about what Edinburgh's outdoors has to offer. "
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> *Councillor Lesley Hinds, Edinburgh City Council*

cities in action

where: Edinburgh, UK
what: environment, knowledge society
when: 2013+

Development

Edinburgh Outdoors was awarded a £25,000 (€30,000) grant by NESTA (National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts – the UK's innovation foundation) to develop the service. It was created by a small team of council staff, designers and developers who worked closely with the council and citizens. Of the grant, £20,000 (€24,000) was spent on development, while the rest was allocated to marketing. A comprehensive communications campaign, supported by promotional materials, ran for the six months after the launch. The total cost of getting the service up and running was £32,720 (€39,200) including staff, developer costs, app development, design, communications and marketing, and hosting and site support.

Results

The reception of Edinburgh Outdoors has exceeded expectations so far, with residents contributing directly through social media, talking proudly about their local parks and sharing information, news and events.

Citizens are definitely using the service on the go: of the 46,000 individual page views since its launch, around a quarter have been from mobile devices. Edinburgh Outdoors now counts more than 1,700 Twitter followers, over 400 Facebook likes, and has had more than 1,000 Android and iPhone downloads.

The most popular content is 'what's on' and 'parks information'. Using the service has had the added bonus of improving citizens' health and wellbeing by encouraging them to get out and enjoy the parks. It has also had a positive impact on social inclusion, with more residents getting involved with community activities.

The results are encouraging, and Edinburgh plans to extend the service further to include routes for cyclists, pedestrians and runners, as well as other facilities, by sharing and importing data from partners.

Obstacles along the way

Edinburgh Outdoors has been recognised as an example of good practice by the NESTA Make it Scotland Programme, and is easily replicable in other countries. Opportunities to do so are being discussed.

But it was not without its challenges: Edinburgh advises selecting one full time project manager to lead on the project, and suggests choosing a suitable online project management and communications tool. The city had no online tool in place and had multiple skilled managers on the team which made leadership and decision making more complex. However, all involved were committed and enthusiastic, and as a result the project delivered beyond targets, adding over 140 parks and green spaces, plus all relevant supporting information, within the agreed timescales.

One of the project's biggest success factors was the work across departments, with the libraries supplying heritage images, the parks staff updating content and the corporate department leading on the project and working with developers. This way of working is often challenging in a large organisation.

Edinburgh was the only one of four councils that delivered its project within NESTA's six month time limit. It has received wide recognition, and was shortlisted for a EUROCITIES 'smart living' award in 2013.

The project is available on the Europe Commons website:

www.europecommons.org/app/city-outdoors.

"The fantastic work being done by the City of Edinburgh Council shows how open data can be used to develop new services for citizens and, by encouraging them to add their own content, to make that service even better."

Jackie McKenzie, head of NESTA's innovation programmes in Scotland

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cities in action

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