

POSITIVELY APACHE JUNCTION

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT OF
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY'S PROJECT CITIES
& THE CITY OF APACHE JUNCTION



This report represents original work prepared for the City of Apache Junction by students participating in courses aligned with Arizona State University's Project Cities program. Findings, information, and recommendations are those of students and are not necessarily of Arizona State University. Student reports are not peer reviewed for statistical or computational accuracy, or comprehensively fact-checked, in the same fashion as academic journal articles. Project partners should use care when using student reports as justification for future actions. Text and images contained in this report may not be used without permission from Project Cities.

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On behalf of the ASU Wrigley Institute and School of Sustainability, we extend a heartfelt thank you to the City of Apache Junction for enthusiastically engaging with students and faculty to confront difficult problems facing the community. Your real-world projects provide students with hands-on opportunities to apply knowledge that can create positive changes to Apache Junction's future livelihood and community wellbeing.



City of Apache Junction

300 East Superstition Boulevard • Apache Junction, Arizona 85119 • www.ajcity.net

February 20, 2018

Dear Apache Junction residents and community members,

On behalf of the City Council and the City of Apache Junction we wanted to let you know about our experience as the inaugural partner city for ASU's Project Cities program. We were extremely grateful for the opportunity to work on four projects with over one hundred-forty students, and eight university professors, in six courses. Each of the projects provided Apache Junction citizens with opportunities for involvement in community improvements.

As a smaller community, Apache Junction doesn't always have the resources to undertake every project that needs to be done. With a small investment in a Project Cities program, we can now work toward completing a few backlogged projects that have been identified in our city work programs and plans. The four projects that were undertaken in the Fall semester of 2017 (Positively AJ, Off-leash Dog Park, Sustainability and Solid Waste, and Understanding Homelessness), have been identified over a number of years as important issues in the Apache Junction community. By engaging with ASU on the four projects, the city has been able to advance each project more quickly than we otherwise would have been able to do with city employees alone.

The research and recommendations for each project gave the city objective insights into some of our ongoing challenges as a city and how we can better serve residents and visitors. The city is already using the report's findings and recommendations to take the next logical steps in moving the projects forward. We look forward to working with ASU and the Project Cities program on future projects!

With gratitude,

Jeff Serdy, Mayor



Bryant Powell, City Manager



ABOUT PROJECT CITIES

Arizona State University's (ASU) Project Cities program is a university-community partnership. For an entire academic year, faculty and students work with a single city to co-create strategies for better environmental, economic, and social balance in the places we live. Students from multiple disciplines research difficult problems chosen by the city, and propose innovative sustainability solutions that will help it achieve a better future. Project Cities is a member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), a growing network of more than 30 educational institutions partnering with cities throughout the United States and world.

ABOUT SUSTAINABLE CITIES

Project Cities is a program of ASU's Sustainable Cities Network. This network was founded in 2008 to support communities in sharing knowledge and coordinating efforts to understand and solve sustainability problems. It is designed to foster partnerships, identify best practices, provide training and information, and connect ASU's research to the front-line challenges facing local communities. Network members come from Arizona cities, towns, counties, and Native American communities, and cover a broad range of professional disciplines. Together, these members work to create a more sustainable region and state. In 2012, the network was awarded the Pacific Southwest Region's 2012 Green Government Award by the U.S. EPA for its efforts. For more information, visit sustainablecities.asu.edu.

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Project Cities

Sustainability Through Local Action

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ABOUT APACHE JUNCTION

The City of Apache Junction is well situated on the eastern edge of Greater Phoenix, the twelfth largest metropolis in the United States, yet it has a small-town, Western feel. This is both intentional, and influenced by geography. Apache Junction sits at the base of the Superstition Mountains and Goldfield Mountains, and is near attractions such as the Lost Dutchman State Park, Goldfield Ghost Town, Superstition Mountain Museum, Canyon Lake, Tortilla Flat, and the historic Apache Trail. Home to 39,000 residents, the city has a population that nearly doubles in the winter, when seasonal residents arrive to enjoy its pleasant weather and unique setting.

It was named Apache Junction because it is located at the intersection of US Route 60 and the historic Apache Trail, which was used by Native Americans and later stagecoaches to traverse the Superstition Mountains, and for the construction of water-reclamation dams along the Salt River. The city also straddles Maricopa County and Pinal County. Incorporated in 1978, Apache Junction has arrived at another crossroads as it matures. While the city wants to retain its small-town character, it must prepare for an increasing population, and has set out to develop greater economic opportunities. In the spring of 2005, Apache Junction debuted the first LEED-certified city hall in Arizona. It is Apache Junction's aspirations and potential for sustainability, and the unique challenges it is facing, that form the basis of its partnership with Arizona State University's Project Cities.

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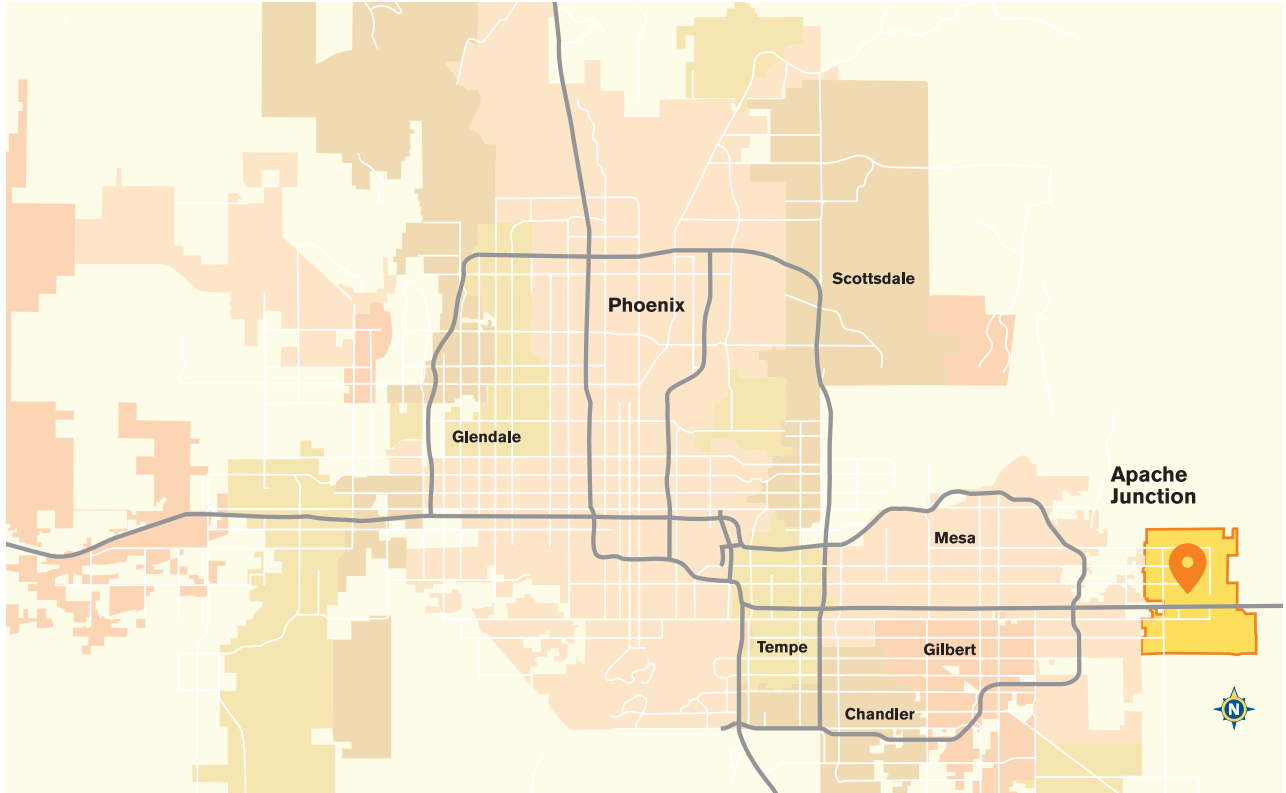
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Surrounded by Legends

ajcity.net

***Map of the City of Apache Junction
and Greater Phoenix, Arizona***



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Apache Junction is located at the scenic foothills of the Superstition Mountains. It has a rich cinematic history, a Western draw, and a banquet of outdoor attractions. Already, the city's official population of roughly 39,000 residents doubles to nearly 80,000 each winter due to a seasonal migration of visitors from colder climates who primarily stay in recreational-vehicle and mobile-home parks. However, city officials believe that beyond this influx, Apache Junction's tourism industry is underperforming. This has in part to do with stereotypes about the community held by residents and visitors. These lingering negative perceptions within and outside of the city, may discourage people from spending time and money in the city, and overshadow its positive attributes.

With its "Positively AJ" campaign, Apache Junction aims to improve its image, attract business, and show that the city is a compelling year-round destination to both residents and nonresidents. It is important to note that visitors are increasingly getting first impressions of destinations through online avenues, and making their decisions based on their digital experiences. Further, having strong understandings of assets, strengths, and opportunities helps destinations such as Apache Junction figure out what visitor market to target, both online and with greater brand campaigns.

This is where Arizona State University's Project Cities enters the picture. Two fall 2017 courses TDM 372 Tourism Planning and TWC 544 User Experience enlisted in the program to support Apache Junction in strengthening the tourism component of Positively AJ. TDM 372 assessed Apache Junction's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and used this analysis to highlight a new target visitor market for Apache Junction and provide guidance for related tourism strategies. TWC 544 User Experience focused on Apache Junction's website from the perspective of potential visitors.

TDM 372 Tourism Planning focused on the overall picture of tourism, from its present state to its promise, in Apache Junction. The students in this course evaluated Apache Junction's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats based on community engagement and literature-based research. Results included that its outdoor attractions (Superstition Mountains, Canyon Lake, Lost Dutchman State Park) and nearby events (Renaissance Festival, Lost Dutchman Days Rodeo) are

some strengths. Weaknesses include lack of coherent brand, lack of funding dedicated to tourism and tourism-related infrastructure, and shortage of restaurants and lodging to support short-term visitors. Building upon these results, the students determined that Apache Junction needs a strong tourism brand, and should consider targeting the adventure tourism market. They presented three strategies, including increasing overall social media activity (as adventure tourists are largely a younger demographic), developing uniform marketing campaigns, and collaborating with other Arizona tourism organizations to cross-promote Apache Junction as an Arizona destination.

TWC 544 User Experience, a course about improving online experiences of internet users, evaluated the visitor page of Apache Junction's website (ajcity.net) for issues and recommendations for improvement. Students determined that its visitor page is difficult to navigate, and lacking in relevant information. Because of these challenges, users may be driven away from the website and, as a result, may be discouraged from visiting Apache Junction. However, by improving navigation and website content, ajcity.net's visitor page can help improve the city's image and attract tourists. The students presented a series of recommendations for improvements, including repairing broken links, embedding related videos directly on the website, and putting the most relevant information—like sites to see, where to stay, and where to eat—within easy view. Improving such visitor content on the site is top priority.

The ideas and recommendations presented by these students are kickoff points for Apache Junction. They are meant to support the city in making improvements through plans informed by research, demographics, concerns, and opportunities. The work is not comprehensive, and any pursuit of the recommendations requires professional review and consideration. That being said, the course reports are meant to stimulate deeper conversations for managers and policy makers.

Following this executive summary, and the goals and recommendations of each report, are introductory summaries of the final reports generated by each course. These cover the problem targeted, research methods used, related findings, the resulting recommendations, and areas for further exploration. Each summary is followed by select student deliverables in their entirety, which can be consulted for greater depth and more clarity on how the recommendations were reached.

PLANNING TOURISM'S FUTURE IN APACHE JUNCTION: ADVENTURE AWAITS GOAL & RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal

The goal of this report from course TDM 372 is to understand Apache Junction's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as a tourism destination, and present strategies that build upon its strengths to create a thriving year-round visitor industry.

In their report, student researchers found that lack of branding, the need for greater infrastructure like lodging, and a negligible city-funded tourism budget were among the reasons the city is bypassed by short-term visitors.

EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHS AND POSSIBLE STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM IN APACHE JUNCTION



Canyon Lake is one of several outdoor attractions near the city that students listed as tourism strengths for Apache Junction. Photo by Abhishek Chinchalkar, <https://flic.kr/p/96UZtN>.

Example of an Instagram post with hashtags that could be shared by other Arizona tourism organizations for mutual promotion. Photo by Jose Mendoza <https://flic.kr/p/DQyJHq>.

Recommendations for the Primary Strategy of Promoting an Outdoor and Western Brand




Branding 	Overall Social Media 	General Promotion 
Create two or three marketing campaigns that specifically target domestic and international adventure travelers.	Increase overall social media activity. (See Figure 6 in individual course content for all related objectives.)	Work with Renaissance Festival organizers to market Apache Junction as a destination to attendees.
Collaborate with other Arizona tourism organizations to reach prospective visitors and encourage travel to Apache Junction. The following two recommendations support this. (See Figure 5 in individual course content for specific objectives.)	Post at least four times per week on social platforms, heavily featuring images with outdoor activities and Western themes.	Market Apache Junction's website as the main online reference for planning a visit to Apache Junction.
Create co-branded campaigns and hashtags with other Arizona tourism organizations, which will link Apache Junction to broader tourism in the state (examples: #MyPHX, #VisitArizona #VisitAJ)	Respond to any posts or comments on official Apache Junction social media profiles within 24 hours to engage new visitors and retain existing ones.	Make sure the visitor content on Apache Junction's website focuses on dining, lodging, and outdoor activities.
Create weekly social media contests engaging locals and visitors.	Evaluate social media, ad campaigns, and co-branded campaigns weekly or monthly.	
Develop cohesive cross-platform social media marketing plans that match overall branding.		
Buy social media ads targeting younger people who follow adventure and lifestyle magazines.		
Frequently post and engage on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, and travel blogs to reach potential tourists.		

Table 1. Recommendations for the primary strategies for tourism in Apache Junction presented by the students, revisited as a table.

Recommendations for Secondary Strategies of Developing Long-Term Resources and Growing Community



Long-term Resources 	Growing Community 
Develop a resort with a company such as Marriott-Starwood or Hilton, which have loyal customers who trust these brands. Such collaboration would also generate additional marketing for Apache Junction.	Develop condos that have attractive amenities like a pool, fitness center, and common areas to encourage community.
Add a resort along the base of the Superstition Mountains that celebrates the landscape, which could be a year-round attraction.	Review the execution, direction, and success of this strategy yearly.
At such lodging, have dining, bar, and entertainment options, to provide night life options for younger visitors without disturbing Apache Junction residents.	
Work to add a variety of restaurants	
Continue to develop the downtown area	
Review the execution, direction, and success of this strategy yearly.	

Table 2. Recommendations for the secondary strategies for tourism in Apache Junction presented by the students, revisited as a table. (See how the students presented all three strategies on page 1-17.)

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CREATING A REWARDING WEBSITE EXPERIENCE FOR POTENTIAL VISITORS

Goal

The goal of this report from course TWC 544 is to understand how Apache Junction's website could better serve and attract potential visitors to the city, and help build a positive identity for the city as an enticing destination.

An assessment by students revealed that the website's visitor page is somewhat difficult to navigate, and lacks the type of information that travelers prioritize.

AN EXAMPLE OF IMPROVING THE WEBSITE USER EXPERIENCE OF A POTENTIAL VISITOR TO APACHE JUNCTION

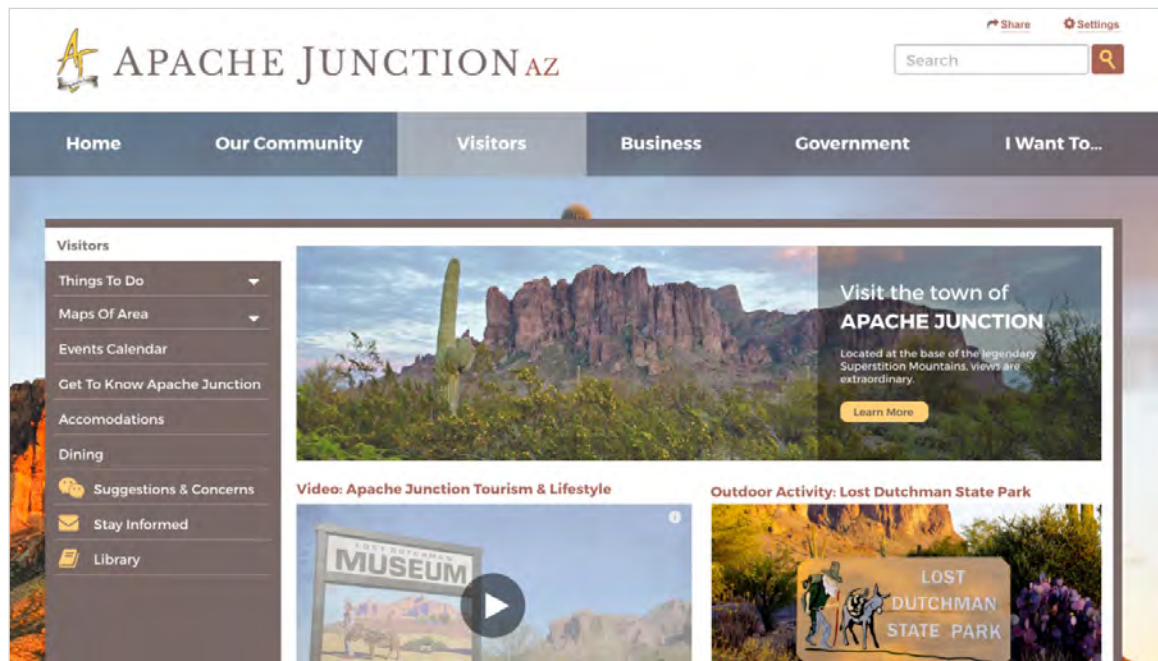


Figure 1. In this student prototype of an updated Apache Junction visitor page, the YouTube video is embedded directly on the homepage, which allows users to watch it without leaving the website.

Recommendations for Improving the User Experience of Apache Junction's Website Visitor Page




Maintain Website 	Improve Website Content 	Improve Website Navigation 
Fix any broken links on the site. There are online tools that provide this service.	Add and expand content to the site to include information visitors need. See Figure 5 in the course section for specific types of content.	Remove any categories from the navigational sidebar that do not relate to visitors.
Put content from PDFs directly on the website, rather than requiring users to download it	Describe images on the website and make sure they are paired with matching content.	Update the sidebar's navigational categories to reflect the priorities of visitors. Keep the number of primary categories limited, and use subcategories to elaborate.
Embed videos directly on the website.	Keep text adequate but concise.	Remove the "hover" function from the menu. Instead, employ the "accordion" function (see Figure 7 in individual course section).
		Update the main landing page to feature content that is at the top of mind for visitors (see Figure 4 in individual course section).

Table 3. Recommendations from student reports regarding improved user experience of visitors to the Apache Junction website, revisited as as table.

FACULTY EVAN JORDAN
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
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372 TOURISM PLANNING
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Planning Tourism's Future in Apache Junction: Adventure Awaits

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INTRODUCTION



The City of Apache Junction has significant draws for visitors, including a range of attractions and an appealing Western personality. Already, Apache Junction has a reliable influx of long-term seasonal visitors who flock to the area in the winter for its weather and scenery. However, the city is not widely known as an attractive short-term destination. As a part of its “Positively AJ” project, Apache Junction wants to determine how it can maximize its tourism potential while benefitting its population in a sustainable manner.

To support the city in this goal, the students of TDM 372 Tourism Planning, in Arizona State University’s School of Community Resources and Development, set out to identify key issues limiting Apache Junction’s visibility as a destination, and develop strategies to overcome them. To begin, the students assessed the city’s existing resources to gain a better understanding of its market position. They also engaged with its community through a focus group and stakeholder interviews. The resulting research data allowed them to establish strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for tourism in Apache Junction (also known as “SWOT analysis”). Based on these results, the students generated one primary strategy and two long-term tourism strategies for Apache Junction to consider. These focus on strategic branding, marketing, infrastructure development, and community building to support a growing industry.

With their report, students aimed to help Apache Junction understand what is limiting its growth as a tourist destination, and generate strategies that will enable it to sustainably develop its tourism market. It is up to Apache Junction to build upon these strategies. The rest of this introductory report for the Tourism Planning section of the “Positively AJ” report describes the methods the students used and presents select findings. Next, it introduces the evidence-based strategies they generated. It ends with areas that can be explored further, and a concise conclusion. Following this is the student report in its entirety.

PROBLEM

While Apache Junction has qualities that lend themselves to a strong tourism industry, city officials believe it is underperforming. In their report, student researchers found that lack of branding, the need for greater infrastructure like lodging, and a negligible city-funded tourism budget were among the reasons the city is bypassed by short-term visitors. Accordingly, Apache Junction needs a strong strategy to correct those deficiencies.

METHODS


To gain a greater understanding of the tourism problem and determine the best ways to address it, the students enrolled in TDM 372 at ASU made use of several research methods. Under the guidance of Professor Jordan, the students assessed Apache Junction's resources, gained context and direction from community members, and determined strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to tourism. The methods used to do so included document analysis, a focus group, stakeholder interviews, and SWOT analysis. The following paragraphs explain these methods, and how they were used to generate insightful results.

Resource Assessment

Content analysis: This research method involves gathering documentation related to a certain focus area, and assessing it to come to insightful conclusions. In this case, the students reviewed materials related to Apache Junction's economic system, social context, government policy, destination brand and demand, physical resources, and existing tourism industry. (See the results in the student report on page 1-20.)

Community Engagement

Focus Group: Twelve Apache Junction stakeholders, including residents and business owners, were assembled to participate in a focus group, in which students directed participants in a guided conversation about tourism in the community. Individuals from various stakeholder groups



were invited to participate by the Public Information/Community Outreach division of Apache Junction. This conversation generated insight and direction for the researchers. In this case, the students and residents discussed the present condition of tourism in Apache Junction, and their visions for the future of tourism in the community.

Stakeholder Interviews: To gain further insight from the experiences of the twelve members of the focus group, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each stakeholder. Student interviewers followed a loose interview guide with questions about stakeholder views of tourism, perceptions of tourism's impact in the community, and opinions on how tourism can sustainably grow into the future. The interviews generated additional information and insights about the current state of tourism in Apache Junction, and the direction that stakeholders envision for its tourism industry.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis: SWOT analysis is a practice used to determine an entity's "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats," and then quantify individual traits and overall categories for greater insight. The students selected traits, also called factors, for each category from their resource assessment and community engagement methods. For example, a factor for "strength" was "Superstition Mountains," and one for weakness was "no official tourism budget." To determine how well the city is performing overall, the students then applied a factor matrix to these factors. To do so, they gave each factor a numbered weight—the higher the weight, the higher its importance for tourism in the community. Added up, the weighting of all factors in the internal categories (strengths and weaknesses) had to equal 1, as did those of the external categories (opportunities and threats). For example, "Superstition Mountains" received a "0.1" weight, as it was a top strength. Next the students rated how well Apache Junction was addressing each element, from 1 (poor) to 4 (well). In this case, "No official tourism budget" got a 1, as Apache Junction was doing

SWOT analysis is a research practice used to determine an entity's "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats."

poorly at appropriating funds. Then, they multiplied each factor's weight by the rating they gave it for Apache Junction's performance.

Finally, they added the results together for the strengths and weaknesses categories (which are the categories in Apache Junction's control), and did the same for opportunities and threats (categories outside of Apache Junction's control). Apache Junction's overall score for "strengths and weaknesses" totaled to 2.93. (See Figure 1 for a list of these steps.) As the lowest possible score is 1 and the highest possible score is 4, this result implies the city has more strengths than weaknesses when it comes to tourism. From this strong starting point, students set out to develop their strategies. (See Table 1.)

HOW THE EVALUATING OF SWOT FACTOR EVALUATION MATRIX WORKS:

1. List 15-20 key internal/external factors
2. Weight each factor from 0 to 1 such that all weights sum to 1
3. Rate effectiveness of the destination responding to each factor on a scale from 1 (poor) to 4 (great)
4. Multiply the weight by the rating for each factor
5. Sum the weighted scores
6. Assess Apache Junction's performance in capitalizing on strengths/opportunities and avoiding weaknesses/threats in relation to the range of possible scores (1 = lowest possible score, 4 = highest possible score)

Figure 1. The steps for quantifying and evaluating SWOT factor matrices.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES MATRICES, INCLUDING EVALUATIVE FIGURES

Strengths	Weight	Effectiveness	Product
Superstition Mountains	0.1	3	0.3
Canyon Lake	0.08	3	0.24
Goldfield Ghost Town	0.07	2	0.14
Renaissance Festival	0.05	3	0.15
Lost Dutchman State Park	0.05	2	0.1
Rodeo	0.04	2	0.8
Cost of living	0.03	1	0.03
R.V. Parks	0.03	3	0.06
Very involved government	0.03	2	0.6
Ordinances (buildings limited to three stories in height)	0.02	1	0.01
Sum:	0.5	Sum:	2.43

Weaknesses	Weight	Effectiveness	Product
Little to no marketing or promotion of Apache Junction; no distinct brand	0.08	1	0.08
No official tourism budget; rely on expenditures and revenue	0.07	1	0.07
Lack of attractions, accommodations, restaurants, etc.	0.07	1	0.07
Low expenditure revenue flow in summer months	0.06	1	0.06
Lack of accessibility (ie. transportation, things being far apart)	0.05	1	0.05
Low infrastructure budget (including signage)	0.04	1	0.04
No official Visitors Bureau and lack of partnering councils in the industry	0.04	1	0.04
Perception of homelessness and drug problem	0.04	1	0.04
Market segment too focused (ie. winter visitors)	0.03	1	0.03
Older residents' negative attitude towards Apache Junction becoming a tourist destination	0.02	1	0.02
Sum:	0.5	Sum:	0.5
		Overall Score:	2.93

Table 1. Internal factors of the SWOT analysis of tourism Apache Junction, including individual weightings and overall score.

FINDINGS

Based on the resource assessment, community engagement, and SWOT analysis, students determined that **while Apache Junction has promising strengths, it does not have any established tourism strategies or branding.** This is readily apparent to the community members. However, those who participated in the focus group do see many potential strengths for the industry, such as the city's wide range of natural and manmade attractions, and events that already draw visitors to the area. For instance, Canyon Lake (see Figure 3) is located just 16 miles from Apache Junction, and marks the beginning of the Apache Trail, one of the most scenic drives in Arizona. (See Figure 2 for a list of attractions.)

Community members believed that better marketing of outdoor recreation like fishing, ATV trails, and state parks could attract visitors from near and far. There is also energy to upgrade such activities and attractions, once the target demographic market has been clarified. However, **there was resistance to increased tourism from some interviewed stakeholders until the impacts and targets of marketing are clearer.** Residents don't want to see resources

ATTRACTIONS IN AND AROUND APACHE JUNCTION

Lost Dutchman State Park	Goldfield Ghost Town
Tonto National Forest	Historic Mammoth Gold Mine
Superstition Mountains	Goldfield Museum
Hiking trails	Prospector's Place
Mountain biking trail	Narrow-Gauge Train Ride
Views of nature	Superstition Zipline
Fishing	Apache Trail Tours
ATV trail	Eagle Eye Shooting Gallery
Wildlife	Superstition OK Corral Stables
Fishing	Lu Lu's Bordello
Lost Dutchman Marathon	Renaissance Festival
Lost Dutchman Days Rodeo	

Figure 2. A list of existing visitor attractions in and near to city of Apache Junction.

they value broadly publicized or mismanaged. They are also concerned that lack of funding or poor planning could negatively affect resources experiencing increased foot traffic.

Another perceived need is better infrastructure for attracting and hosting an influx of visitors. Already, 28,000 people per year attend multi-day events like the **Renaissance Festival and the Lost Dutchman Days Rodeo**. Such events are strengths for the city, as they bring people to the area who can be converted into returning visitors. **But a broad lack of tourism infrastructure prevents them from spending more than a day at a time in the city.** Needed infrastructure includes small details like signage to attract and direct visitors, and superstructure developments like resorts or branded lodging. Further, **dining options are limited and already at capacity in the winter.** An increase in visitors may overwhelm businesses and generate negative experiences. As a result, Apache Junction will need to gain service-oriented attractions and jobs to support any further tourism development.



Figure 3. Canyon Lake is one of several outdoor attractions near the city that were listed as tourism strengths for Apache Junction. Photo by Abhishek Chinchalkar, <https://flic.kr/p/96UZtN>.

Related **tourism weaknesses of the city are that it does not have an official tourism budget, a budget for infrastructure to attract and support increased tourism, or a tourism bureau like a Convention and Visitors Bureau** (although there is a Chamber of Commerce, which is contracted by the city to provide a tourism center.) Without these components, the city is unable to establish or support a specific tourism brand, marketing strategy, or targeted audience. Community members see an opportunity to create a unique venue, like a water park, to attract summer visitors. They want local businesses to receive more promotion and support. However, without a cohesive strategy in mind, it is unclear what ideas are the right ones to pursue.

If Apache Junction looks at these weaknesses head-on, they can be viewed as opportunities, as reflected in the SWOT analysis. The students' research reveals that **Apache Junction's branding is a blank slate, which means it has the chance to establish an identifiable and enticing brand that taps into niche tourism markets.** For instance, **with its bounty of outdoor attractions, recreational activities, and perception as a rural and natural place, the city has the opportunity to tap the adventure and recreational tourism niche markets.** Niche markets attract millennial travelers, a promising new visitor demographic for Apache Junction. In parallel, another opportunity is to increase and maintain its existing winter visitor market, as there has been an uptick in domestic travel to and within Arizona.

Community members who participated in the student research were divided about the direction Apache Junction should take regarding tourism. However, the students found that the city has numerous strengths and opportunities to capitalize on, if it can address the weaknesses revealed by the community engagement and resource assessment. For this purpose, they created specific strategies. A promising sign for Apache Junction is that all community members had pride in the city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

By examining the findings gleaned from community engagement, resource assessment, and a SWOT analysis, students generated evidence-based recommendations for Apache Junction. Guidance for moving forward as a tourism destination is presented in the form of one primary and two secondary strategies. The primary strategy is to promote an outdoor and Western brand that targets niche markets, capitalizing on social media to do so. To support the primary strategy, two secondary strategies are recommended. One secondary strategy is to develop long-term tourism resources, specifically lodging, dining, and entertainment. The other is to develop new neighborhoods and a walkable downtown to attract and accommodate residents interested in working in the growing tourism sector. The following sections present highlighted details of these strategies. (For the strategies in their entirety, see page 1-17.)

PRIMARY STRATEGY: PROMOTE OUTDOOR AND WESTERN BRAND

This strategy capitalizes on Apache Junction's strengths, while building on opportunities to create a unique brand and target a niche audience. According to the students, the audience of "adventure travelers" aligns with the city's strengths, since this demographic seeks physical activities, environmental interaction, and cultural immersion. Adventure tourism grew by 37.2% across Europe, North America, and South America between 2009 and 2012, according to the Adventure Travel Trade Association. The average age of adventure travelers is 36. They are technologically engaged, meaning they often turn to online sources to determine their destinations (student report, page 1-17). In response to these characteristics of the recommended niche audience, a significant portion of the strategy involves employing social media for marketing.

Adventure tourism grew by 37.2% across Europe, North America, and South America between 2009 and 2012.



For marketing campaign:

1. Create two or three marketing campaigns that specifically target domestic and international adventure travelers.
2. Collaborate with other Arizona tourism organizations to reach prospective visitors and encourage travel to Apache Junction. Items 3 and 4 support this recommendation. (See Figure 5 for specific objectives.)
3. Create co-branded campaigns and hashtags with other Arizona tourism organizations, which will link Apache Junction to broader tourism in the state (examples: #MyPHX, #VisitArizona #VisitAJ). (See Figure 4 for example of hashtag use.)
4. Create weekly social media contests engaging locals and visitors.
5. Develop cohesive cross-platform social media marketing plans that match overall branding. Items 6 and 7 support this recommendation.
6. Buy social media ads targeting younger people who follow adventure and lifestyle magazines.
7. Frequently post and engage on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, and travel blogs to reach potential tourists.

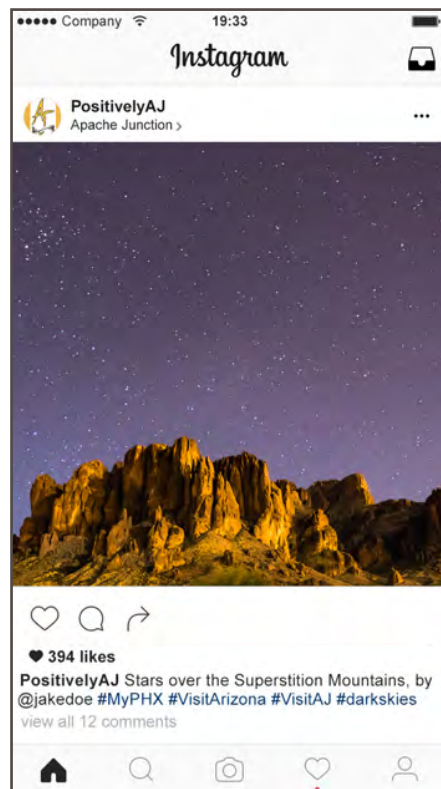


Figure 4. Example of an Instagram post with hashtags that could be shared by other Arizona tourism organizations for mutual promotion. Photo by Jose Mendoza <https://flic.kr/p/DQyJHq>.



Recommendations for social media:

8. Increase overall social media activity. Items 9 and 10 support this recommendation. (See figure 6 for all related objectives.)
9. Post at least four times per week on social platforms, heavily featuring images with outdoor activities and Western themes.
10. Respond to any posts or comments on official Apache Junction social media profiles within 24 hours to engage new visitors and retain existing ones.
11. Evaluate social media, ad campaigns, and co-branded campaigns weekly or monthly.



General recommendations for brand promotion:

12. Work with Renaissance Festival organizers to market Apache Junction as a destination to attendees.
13. Market Apache Junction's website as the main online reference for planning a visit to Apache Junction.
14. Make sure the visitor content on Apache Junction's website focuses on dining, lodging, and outdoor activities.

OBJECTIVES FOR COLLABORATING WITH OTHER AZ TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS

Objective 1: Co-brand campaigns and hashtags (#) that link Apache Junction to overall tourism for Arizona by following a uniform marketing strategy, i.e. #MyPHX #VisitArizona #VisitMesa #Visit AJ

Objective 2: Create weekly social media contests that ask locals and visitors to share their most memorable experiences in AJ by posting photos or written statuses. At the end of the week choose one winner that gets an incentive to re-visit the city and experience one new attraction.

Figure 5. The objectives students proposed for collaborating with other Arizona tourism organizations.

INCREASING OVERALL SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY

Objective 1: Post at least four times per week on platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) as pages are arithmetically organized and could result in less views if posts are infrequent. Coordinate posts to project a cohesive brand. Heavily feature images with outdoor activities and Western themes.

Objective 2: Work with Snapchat in creating geofilters and artistic filters to showcase Apache Junction as a destination. Snapchat is a growing form of social media, especially in younger generations. Aim to get featured in the daily stories or featured stories on snapchat.

Objective 3: Respond to social media posts and comments to official Apache Junction accounts within 24 hours. Engaging followers is key to gaining new visitors and retaining current ones.


Figure 6. Specific objectives for social media with new branding and marketing campaign.



SECONDARY STRATEGY: DEVELOP LONG-TERM TOURISM RESOURCES

This strategy focuses on developing infrastructure for attracting and hosting tourists in ways that don't negatively impact Apache Junction's strengths of outdoor resources and Western culture. Specifically, it encourages bringing a recognized lodging brand to the city, emphasizing the physical landscape of the city when doing so, and focusing new attraction elements in this area.

1. Develop a resort with a company such as Marriott-Starwood or Hilton, which have loyal customers who trust these brands. Such collaboration would also generate additional marketing for Apache Junction.
2. Add a resort along the base of the Superstition Mountains that celebrates the landscape, which could be a year-round attraction.
3. At such lodging, have dining, bar, and entertainment options, to provide night life options for younger visitors without disturbing Apache Junction residents.

- 
4. Review strategy's execution, direction, and success yearly.
 5. Continue to develop the downtown area.
 6. Work to add a variety of restaurants.



SECONDARY STRATEGY: DEVELOPING COMMUNITY TO ACCOMMODATE FUTURE TOURISM GROWTH

Real estate is the focus of this strategy. To support a growing tourism industry, the students propose that Apache Junction needs to preemptively develop housing options for younger people interested in working in tourism. This could help build a sense of community in Apache Junction, contribute to the economy, and increase well-being. Further, attractive amenities coincidental to the new development like pools will encourage friends and family of residents to visit. Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism is the top reason for travel, worldwide.

- 1) Develop condos that have attractive amenities like a pool, fitness center, and common areas to encourage community.
- 2) Review strategy's execution, direction, and success yearly.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Basic research on visitor statistics and current visitor profiles would help Apache Junction a great deal in understanding the current tourism market. While the tourism plan identified adventure tourists as a market likely to be interested in visiting, further market research can garner more detailed information about specific market segments. Understanding both current and potential travelers is key to successful tourism marketing, especially when undertaking branding activities and social media campaigns.

CONCLUSION

As part of its “Positively AJ” endeavors, Apache Junction would like to develop a cohesive tourism strategy. Currently, the city has significant strengths, especially its outdoor attractions and recreational activities. However, it does not have a brand to promote them, nor budget devoted to developing a tourism industry. The students of the fall 2017 course TDM 372 Tourism Planning with Professor Jordan assessed Apache Junction’s resources, engaged with community members, and performed a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. Then, based on their findings, the students generated three strategies for the city to consider. These included targeting the niche adventure tourism market, and developing infrastructure and community to attract and support a growing tourism industry. By directing attention and resources to these opportunities, Apache Junction has the potential to bring new visitors to its scenic city.

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TECHNICAL WRITING &
COMMUNICATION

544 USER EXPERIENCE
FALL 2017

Creating a Rewarding Website Experience for Potential Visitors

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, travelers use online resources to choose their destinations. How cities are portrayed, and the ease with which information can be found about them, are important factors in these decisions. As part of its “Positively AJ” marketing campaign, Apache Junction hopes to attract new visitors to the city and improve its image. To support these efforts online, students in TWC 544 User Experience, a technical communication course at Arizona State University, evaluated the user experience Apache Junction’s website. The goal of user experience research is to understand how someone experiences an online resource like a website in order to make this resource more useful, attractive, and easy to navigate. This report describes the course’s methods and findings.

For this project, students focused on the visitors’ page of Apache Junction’s website, www.ajcity.net/31/ visitors. Four student teams examined it, assessing its organization and content. They also compared it to websites serving similar purposes. Then, they recruited participants who helped determine what changes would align the website with the priorities of “Positively AJ.” Under the guidance of Professor Tatiana Batova, the students collected qualitative data from these participants to directly understand how users engaged with the website, and what frustrated these users. This process helped identify critical user needs and design improvements for the website. Finally, the students built prototypes of the website to demonstrate what such improvements could look like.

“If user experience is great, you don’t really see it.”
—Professor Batova

With this project, the city’s goal was to determine how its website could better meet the needs of potential visitors, in alignment with “Positively AJ.” While research was focused on the ajcity.net visitor page, recommendations can also be applied to any of Apache Junction’s current or future visitor platforms, such as visitaj.com. The remainder of this User Experience section of the “Positively AJ” report explains the comprehensive methods students employed to identify user needs and feedback. It then details their findings and resulting recommendations. The report concludes with areas for further exploration and a concise conclusion, followed by select student team reports in their entirety.

PROBLEM

Apache Junction wants its online platform to attract visitors to the city. However, it is unsure if its website page is successful in doing so. A quick assessment revealed that the visitor page may lack the type of information that travelers prioritize and is somewhat difficult to navigate. Because of these challenges, users may be driven away from the website and, as a result, may be discouraged from visiting Apache Junction.

METHODS

To better understand and address this problem, four teams of students in the ASU course TWC 544 User Experience employed systematic, human-centered research practices including interviews, comparative analysis, content audit, usability testing, surveys, and card sorting. They did so under the guidance of Professor Batova, who also provided them with insights from Apache Junction's website analytics. With these methods, the students pinpointed problematic characteristics of the website and determined ways the site could be adjusted to give users a compelling experience. Qualitative data collection allowed students to get direct understandings of how users were engaging with the website. It also helped students understand what users expect from this visitor resource. Research questions one team considered included (page 4-2):

- Who is the intended user?
- What are some usability pain points within the current site design?
- Do visitors get the information they are looking for when visiting the site?
- Do users think the website is easy to use?
- Can the users complete the tasks they came to the website with?

From such questions and the following research methods, the teams were able to develop clear recommendations for how to improve the user experience of Apache Junction's visitor page. What follows highlights the methods deployed for testing the website and how the students used them to get insightful results.



Review Methods

Content audit: This is a common user experience research method. It involves inventorying content on a website, documenting how it is organized, and assessing how well it works. By auditing Apache Junction's visitor page, students were able to familiarize themselves with the site, better understand what information is already available, and determine what issues stand out. First, they catalogued content relevant to visitors and assessed its quality. Next, they created personas of the types of users who would use the site and then built related test scenarios—for example, a 69-year-old retired woman with two kids and two grandkids who lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota is looking for hiking trails in the Superstition Mountains. (See page 4-11 for the entire persona the students created.) These personas support the following research method, and are also findings in their own right, as will be explained later. The students then examined the site's content from these perspectives to determine how well it supports the tasks and goals of visitors.

Usability testing: For this research method, students recruited participants, through personal networks and user testing software, to test the website from the point of view of potential visitors of Apache Junction. Usability testing exposes how well existing online resources support users in navigating content and areas where improvement is needed. The participants, who were chosen for how they aligned with the previously created personas, were given tasks (which were determined through interviews, explained next) to achieve on the page such as, “You want to visit Apache Junction. You are looking for places to stay and activities to do while there.” This testing also provided the teams with first-hand observations of user-to-website interaction. (See student report page 4-5 for details about what this means.)

Research participants were given tasks for usability testing like “You want to visit Apache Junction. Look for activities to do while you are there.”

Interviews: Along with the usability testing, student teams interviewed the participants. These interviews covered the expectations they had of such sites, and any preconceived notions about Apache Junction. Students also inquired about initial impressions of the website. After the participants did the usability testing, they were interviewed again, this time about their impressions, frustrations, and experiences.

Comparative Methods

Comparative analysis: This method involves comparing the subject of research with the same subject of other entities. The idea is to look for inspiration for how to make changes, rather than having to reinvent the wheel. In this case, students assessed visitor websites of select cities with population sizes and attractions comparable to those of Apache Junction. Cities the teams chose included Marana, Arizona; Wake Forest, North Carolina; and Sierra Vista, Arizona. This method allowed the students to see how Apache Junction measures up, and learn how other cities had overcome issues that Apache Junction is facing. For example, students found the Sierra Vista website exemplified how drop-down navigation and specific content could benefit users of Apache Junction's site. Overall, this method helped students visualize how Apache Junction might improve its website experience for potential visitors.

Envisioning Methods

Survey: Student teams gave research participants surveys that inquired about their experiences of the existing site, what they disliked about it, and what more they wanted from the online resource. Results confirmed that such users would like to see more relevant content like hotels, restaurants, and shopping locations on the website.

Card sorting: This method is used to figure out the most intuitive way to organize information on websites. There are two ways to do this: closed and open. Closed card sorting provides the overall categories regarding a website as well as the topics, and asks participants to sort each topic into the category that it fits best within. Open card sorting asks participants to define their own categories based on the topics at hand. For this report, the student teams chose from these two approaches, and provided participants with topics they selected from Apache Junction's website page. (When the students performed this method in person, these were provided as physical cards. Online, they were presented through card sorting software as set terms.) The participants were then given a limited time to group these cards into categories they preferred. Resulting categories included dining, hiking, family activities, maps, and seasonal activities (see Figure 1 for an example of this). According to

one of the student teams, card sorting revealed a lot about the website's pain points and visitor preferences. It also helped the teams suggest adjustments to basic navigation, desired links, and other content that visitors would expect to find on the site. (See student report page 4-7 for details.)

LODGING/HOTELS	DINING	HIKING	FAMILY ACTIVITIES	FITNESS	SHOPPING	SPECIAL EVENTS/CALENDAR
The Grand Hotel	Handlebar Pub and Grill	Lost Goldmine Trail	Salt River	Apache Junction Multi-Generation Center	Mother Lode Mercantile	Antique Tractor Show
Best Western Apache Junction Inn	Mining Camp Restaurant	Peralta Trailhead	Roosevelt Lake	Youth Fitness Classes	Stop and Shop Military Surplus	Arizona Renaissance Festival
Motel 6	Dutchman's Hideout	Silly Mountain Park	Canyon Lake	Girls on the Run	Unnecessary Necessities	Lost Dutchman Days
Hampton Inn & Suites	Filly's Roadhouse	The Dutchman Trail	Apache Lake	Fit Families	Swap Meet	Veteran's Day Parade
KOA Kampground	The Hitching Post	Usery Mountain Regional Park	Tortilla Flat			Festival of the Superstitions
		Cave Trail	Boyce Thompson Arboretum			
			Tonto National Forest			
			Goldfield Ghost Town			
			OK Corral Stables			
			Apache Trail Jeep Tours			
			The Dolly Steamboat			
			Commemorative Air Force Museum			
			Superstition Mountain Museums			
			Military Surplus and Museum			

Figure 1. How a participant of one team's card sorting research organized content for Apache Junction's visitor page. (From student report, page 3-8.)

FINDINGS

Using these qualitative, human-centered research methods, the four student teams were able to gather important insights regarding user experience of the Apache Junction website page for visitors. Interviews and surveys revealed that the **participants wanted a website with sufficient yet concise information**. This content should be visually stimulating and have short descriptions with imagery. Navigating the website should also be easy. However, research showed that Apache

Junction's website page for visitors did not meet these expectations. The primary issues that the students and participants encountered were the following: difficulty navigating the site and a lack of content important to visitors.

Navigation

Navigating the website frustrated participants and students in several ways. **Issues included faulty and external links, an insufficient search function, and inadequate sidebar categories.** Misleading links included links to pages that no longer existed, also called “broken links” or “dead links” (see Figure 2). They also included links that led to unrelated pages. These can make any website seem unreliable. Sometimes, links led participants in circles. When participants tried to escape the circle by using the website's search function, it produced unrelated content.

Another navigation issue was the placement of relevant content in a PDF that had to be downloaded and in a video that was not directly embedded on the site. Being led away from the site confused the users, and generally, it diminishes the likelihood of search engines to prioritize the site in their results. Further, PDFs are very distracting when accessed with a mobile device, as they appear very small and send users to a new browser window where you can't press



Figure 2. This is what users found when they clicked on the broken link for Prospector Park on the Apache Junction visitor page.



Figure 3. How a PDF looks on a mobile device.

the back arrow to return to the website (see Figure 3). Finally, students found that **the website's navigation bar and sidebar categories were irrelevant to user interests** and even changed at times. Such struggles are time-consuming and frustrating. They also increase the chances that users will leave the site, never to return.

Content

The other main finding of this research was that **the website's content does not meet the needs of potential visitors to Apache Junction**.

Researchers and participants who imagined that they were planning a trip to the city found that things they wanted to know, like places to stay, where to eat, and top destinations, were either difficult to find, or were not on the website at all.

Other things participants wanted that they couldn't find included maps, area history, upcoming events, and popular restaurants. The content that was on the site was not easy to locate or was outdated.

While **researchers liked the maroon, blue, and brown color scheme of the website, and thought it had nice imagery**, they found that images were not placed with relevant content, or lacked description. Generally, while Apache Junction's website has the potential to attract visitors to the area, it has significant barriers that currently prevent it from doing so.

Personas

Personas are helpful for user experience research, but they are also a beneficial finding of such research. To create the personas used for research, the students consulted Apache Junction website analytics information provided by Professor Tatiana, as well as insight from one student who visited the city. These personas, which can be found in the reports that follow this introductory report, can be used as an inspiration and reality check for designers and strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

By examining these research findings, reflecting on participant input, and comparing the Apache Junction website with those of other cities, the student teams developed a number of recommendations for creating a positive user experience of the Apache Junction website page. Their recommendations range in ease of implementation from the simple practice of removing or replacing broken links to the more extensive endeavor of overhauling the website's navigation and design.

When implementing such recommendations, Professor Batova recommends doing so incrementally to avoid an extensive overhaul that may result in new flaws to be addressed. To begin, select a couple recommendations, implement them, then test them with three to five people to see if they are successful or need further improvement. (There is no need to test with more than five people, as five will diagnose 85% of any issues.)

Maintain the Website

The first set of recommendations pertains to upkeep of the website. These practices will improve how users perceive the reliability of the site. They will also improve its Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which is how high up the website will rank if someone uses a search platform to look for specific information about Apache Junction.

1. The top priority should be to fix any broken links on the site, such as the Prospector Park link on the main visitor page. There are online tools that provide this service (student report page 3-10).
2. Put content from PDFs directly on the website, rather than requiring users to download it. Students found that users liked the video and PDF that are currently available on the website, but were frustrated that they had to leave the website to see them.
3. Embed videos directly on the website. This allows visitors to watch them while on the same page (see Figure 4). This way, users do not have to leave the website to see engaging, compelling content.

There are numerous simple online tools that help find and fix broken links. One student team recommended Xenu's free Link Sleuth, <http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink>.

Improve Website Content

The second set of recommendations regards content on the website. Adding content to the site that is relevant to visitors will improve Apache Junction's search results and keep users from leaving the page for other resources. It will also help local businesses, as it will increase the chances of visitors coming to their establishments. While updating website content can be a time-intensive process, it is important. Without such content, visitors are left feeling frustrated and uninformed.

1. Add and expand content to the site to include information visitors often look for, like where to stay or what to do. See Figure 5 for specific types of content.
2. Describe images placed on the website and make sure they are paired with matching content.

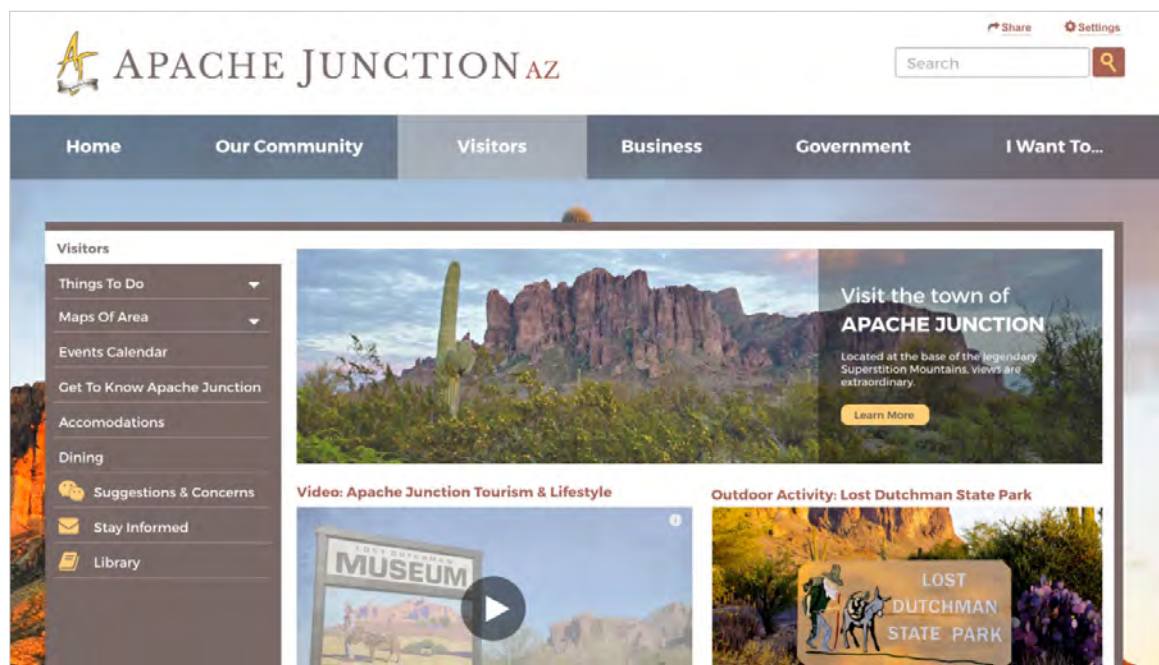


Figure 4. In this student prototype of an updated Apache Junction visitor page, the YouTube video is embedded directly on the homepage, which allows users to watch it without leaving the website.

3. Keep text adequate but concise. Too much text can overwhelm users.
4. Add a searchable and/or sortable calendar of events to the visitor content that makes it easier to figure out details about an event: Is it child-friendly? Is it outdoors? It is important to keep this calendar updated, as an empty or out-of-date calendar can also be a deterrent.

TYPES OF CONTENT VISITORS LOOK FOR

Accommodations
Maps of the city
Maps of hiking and biking trails
History of the city and the area
Places to eat/popular restaurants
Descriptions of hikes
Family activities
Events calendar
Where to go shopping
Outdoor activities

Figure 5. Types of content the students recommended Apache Junction add to its website page for visitors.

Improve Navigation of Website

The third group of recommendations regards the organization of content. The website should present its information in a way that is easily accessible and navigable. (This is called the architecture of the website.) It should also be encouraging and engaging for users.

1. Remove any categories from the navigational sidebar that do not relate to visitors, including Jobs/Volunteer, Adopt a Pet, and Pinal County Information. Such content can confuse visitors or make them think they are on the wrong page. It can also create unnecessary visual clutter.

2. Update the sidebar's navigational categories to reflect the priorities of visitors. Based on the card sorting and other research, students came up with promising categories (Figure 6). Another team recommended that Apache Junction keep this limited to four to six such categories, with secondary categories if necessary. (For example, "Things To Do" could be a sidebar menu category, and secondary categories of this could be "Dining," "Hiking," and "Shopping.")
3. Remove the "hover" function from the menu, which requires users to hover their pointers over categories to see subcategories. Instead, employ the "accordion" function, which allows subcategories to appear beneath a main category when it is clicked (see Figure 7).

Professor Batova recommends 4 to 6 primary categories for navigational menus, which can have relevant subcategories. If content falls into more than one category, it is OK to repeat it in each to ensure users can find it.

CURRENT VERSUS MODIFIED NAVIGATION FOR VISITORS TO AJ WEBSITE

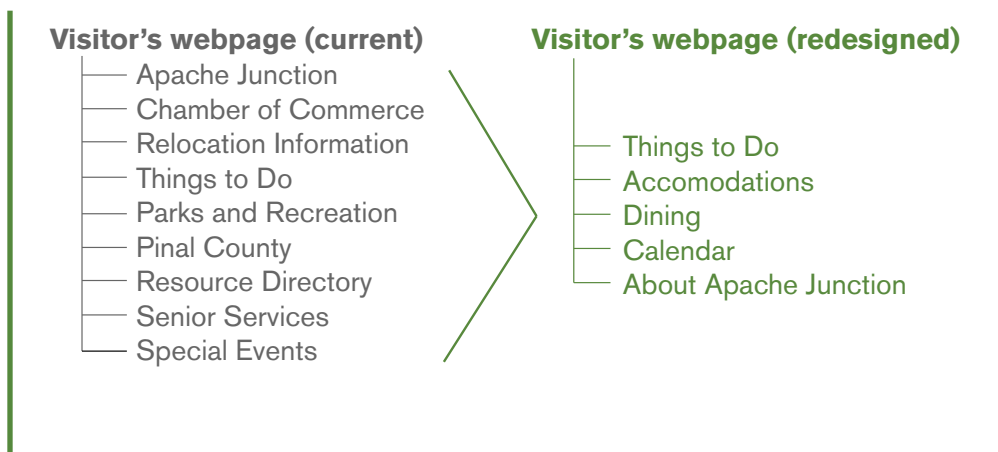


Figure 6. The visitor page's current navigational categories, compared to more streamlined, visitor-specific navigational categories (from student report pages 3-7 and 3-9).

4. Update the main landing page to feature content that is at the top of mind for visitors, such as Lost Dutchman State Park and the Superstition Mountains (see Figure 4).
5. While unrelated to that of potential visitors, the user experience of Apache Junction's online complaints filing system also has room for improvement. For more information, see the "Analysis of Solid Waste Complaints and Environmental Health Aspects" report within the "Sustainability and Solid Waste" report.

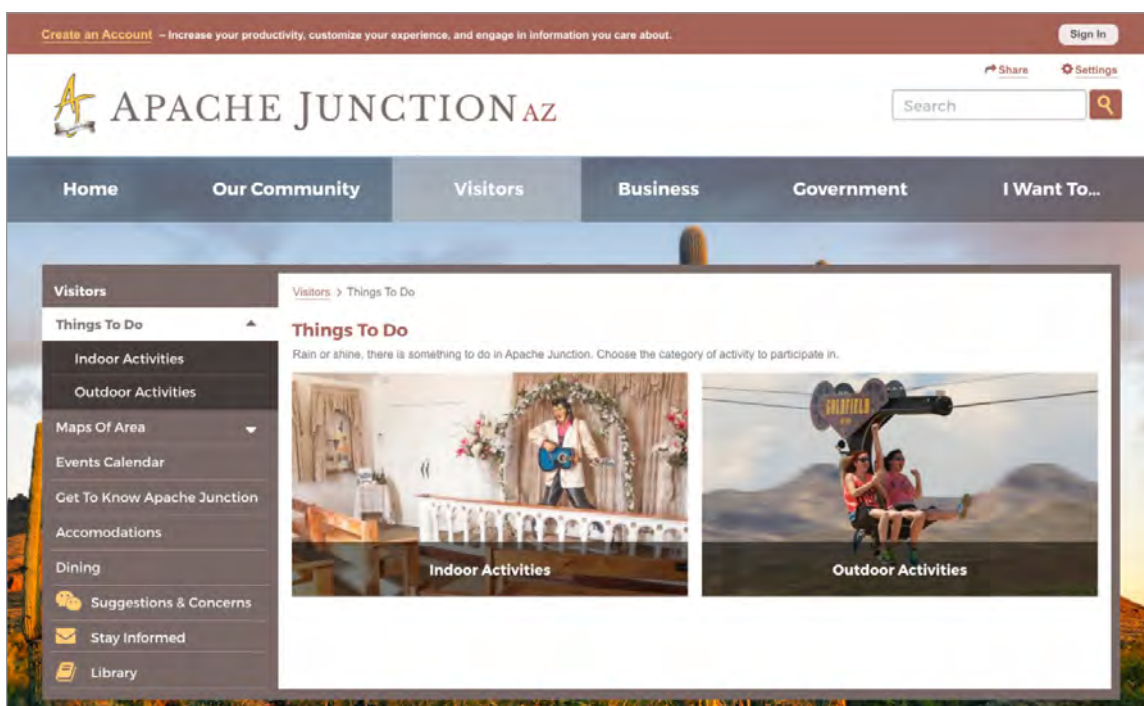


Figure 7. In this student prototype, see the accordion dropdown in the left menu bar, which reveals submenu items when a menu item is clicked.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

According to Professor Batova, the majority of visitors to the Apache Junction website were viewing the visitor page on mobile devices (which include smartphones and tablets). This trend is only expected to increase. Because of this, she recommends that Apache Junction consider making its website “mobile-first,” or designed primarily for viewing on mobile technology.

If Apache Junction’s website is not already hosted on a content management system, it should consider doing so. These systems make it easy for anyone with access to update content, and even design, in comparison to custom-made websites. They can also be cheaper than hiring a designer to make and maintain a custom website.

Another thing for Apache Junction or a future student team to pursue is the best way to incorporate a calendar into Apache Junction’s visitor page. There are certain calendar platforms that can even automatically populate the dates based on content on the website.

CONCLUSION

With its “Positively AJ” campaign, Apache Junction aspires to improve the perception of the city and attract visitors to its burgeoning downtown and scenic destinations. However, the visitor page of the city’s website, ajcity.net, does not currently meet these desires. Graduate students in the fall 2017 course TWC 544 User Experience with Professor Tatiana Batova evaluated the user experience of Apache Junction’s website, researched its usability, and suggested ways to make it more appealing to visitors. By improving the navigation of the website, and adding content that visitors prioritize, Apache Junction can create a positive, insightful experience for users considering trips to the city.

For this course, student teams also made mockups of websites. These were presented as interactive PDFs. To review these reports, visit <https://tinyurl.com/y9bc2qqy>.

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Apache Junction Tourism Plan

Created by the Students of TDM 372
Arizona State University
Advised by Evan Jordan, Ph.D.

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Executive Summary

Apache Junction is a city off of US Highway 60 that has unique access to Arizona's natural attractions and a small town western feel. Currently, it is known to many Arizona natives and tourists as a transit region to pass through on the way to other cities in Arizona. This tourism plan is designed to provide evidence based guidance about how to move Apache Junction forward as a tourism destination. Tourism plans provide an organized and efficient platform for research, analysis, impacts, and strategies for tourism development in a specific city to be compiled in a way so those active in the community can understand and follow. This tourism plan for Apache Junction was a collaborative effort between the students in Dr. Evan Jordan's Tourism planning class (TDM 372) at Arizona State University and the community of Apache Junction.

Research conducted through an in-depth resource assessment and community engagement process identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) for tourism in the community. Apache Junction's strengths as a tourism destination include its close proximity to natural resources and the western atmosphere. The weaknesses include a lack of a strong brand and limited built attractions and entertainment. These strengths and weaknesses lead to the opportunities for growth in Apache Junction. The natural resources and western feel can be a great start for niche tourism markets to allow Apache Junction to stand out from its competitors. An important niche market for Apache Junction to market towards are adventure tourists. These types of tourists are attracted to nature based tourism that Apache Junction has an abundance in and are not interested in typical tourism infrastructure found in large cities. Adventure tourists are not only growing in numbers and average spending; they also plan trips through social media. The lack of a brand is currently a weakness, but branding and marketing through social media outlets will be a huge opportunity to grow tourism generally and through the niche markets. Social media can be a quick and relatively cheap solution to marketing as a whole. Finally, the threats to tourism development for Apache Junction lay with the internal attitude towards tourism. Residents appeared to be divided in their opinions for tourism growth, how to accomplish it, and who to market towards. These split opinions are threats to a united community front that can be important for tourism growth. The division in the community originates between full-time and winter residents. Therefore, the implementation of events and opportunities to engage all types of residents can benefit the community atmosphere.

The following full tourism plan begins with a discussion of community engagement activities. Then, all issues identified through community engagement activities and a resource assessment of the community are presented in a full SWOT analysis. This analysis is followed by a primary strategy to strengthen Apache Junction's tourism brand. Branding was a specific issue that stakeholders in the community of Apache Junction sought to address. Then, secondary strategies to address long term tourism growth are presented. Finally, a brief discussion of evaluation of strategies follows. Data collected in the resource assessment of the community is presented in Appendix I.

It is important to approach tourism in Apache Junction with long term sustainability in mind. Branding and target marketing will help establish Apache Junction as a tourism destination, however, the long-term future of Apache Junction as a destination depends a great deal on additional community development. The secondary strategies were crafted with this in mind. They include: lodging development, infrastructure and food and beverage outlets

expansion, and community centered growth. Expansion is important to keep Apache Junction in competition with other cities in Arizona. A strong feeling of community for tourism employees, families, and winter visitors combined will allow Apache Junction to continue growing as a tourism destination into the future.

Community Engagement

Through the use of a community focus group and individual stakeholder interviews, a substantial amount of valuable information was gathered in order to evaluate the current development of tourism in Apache Junction. In total, 12 individuals from the community of Apache Junction took part in in-depth interviews and a focus group focused on tourism in the community. The community has shown interest in gaining tourism opportunities to help bring a rise to culture, income, and status within Arizona. Throughout the interview process many themes were brought up that the community would like to establish in their own town. Some of these themes were how to, upgrade outdoor recreational activities, create more infrastructure within the city, and specify which tourist demographic to market to. From the stakeholders meeting, a handful of the interviewees had similar ideas for their community as well as a few additional interests in improvement. Overall, many stakeholders have a similar vision but are somewhat unsure of what needs to be done to get there. This report summarizes the different views that the interviewed stakeholders have toward the city of Apache Junction.

Apache Junction offers a beautiful view of the Superstition mountains, but the community does not feel that it markets itself in a progressive way. The town offers the most beautiful hikes and views of nature in the Phoenix area; however, many feel as if tourists are unaware of the recreational sites that Apache Junction offers. Many of the people that know about these outdoor exploration areas happen to either be locals or winter visitors. In the focus group conducted with the stakeholders of Apache Junction, many discussed the potential ways of utilizing the mountains to attract a variety of tourists and not just those that reside in the area. There were ideas of creating more marketing opportunities for fishing, ATV trails, as well as advertising the city as having one of the best state parks. One local stakeholder explained “Apache Junction’s hiking trails are our best kept secret that I don’t want people knowing about.” As this is the city’s main tourist attraction, some stakeholders find that it can be difficult to convince other locals of the opportunities it can provide due to their desire to keep the area a secret. This is understandable as an increase in foot traffic can lead to the destruction of these natural sites. Many of the people that were interviewed raised concerns on this topic because there is not a lot of funding to ensure that these areas are preserved. Currently, Apache Junction stakeholders believe there is an opportunity of boosting outdoor recreational activities to attract visitors, but they feel they’re lacking a governing body to manage the area and support of locals wanting to increase tourism traffic in the area.

As mentioned previously, it seems that another concern in Apache Junction is the attitude expressed by some of the other locals. Many business owners and residents have expressed that the attitude of locals towards tourists can be quite pessimistic. Some of the residents believe that the town has no need for any further changes, and they do not want tourists coming in and disrupting their quality of life. Apache Junction is a small city in regards to infrastructure, and this can lead some of the community members into thinking that it is too crowded when tourists or winter visitors visit their town. This view is divided amongst members of the community as some locals see tourism as a profitable opportunity for Apache Junction. They have pride toward the city and want others to experience the individualistic nature of the town and all of its natural beauty. Conclusively, stakeholders believe that the town needs to have a mutual understanding of what tourism would do for Apache Junction.

In addition to split opinions of locals toward tourists, there is also a divide among the community members regarding perceptions of winter visitors. Currently, winter visitors make up the majority of tourism for Apache Junction in the months of October through April. However, there is not a widely-accepted decision for the winter visitors' classification as tourists or part-time residents. When Apache Junction was in the beginning stages of development, they focused on building up this part of tourism and creating beautiful RV Parks and communities to attract the winter visitors. Part of the community values winter visitors but want to move forward and focus attention elsewhere for tourism. Other community members feel moving forward in tourism can potentially change the current environment for winter visitors in Apache Junction and the community as a whole in a negative way. Stakeholders agree that the winter visitors contribute to the local economy and that the RV Parks are an important part of Apache Junction. The division of opinion is apparent in the discussion on how to progress Apache Junction's tourism for the future.

This brings us to another concern expressed by community residents of Apache Junction: there is a lack of young people who visit the town. Currently, they do not have a specific downtown center for young people to get together. This makes visiting the town for dinner or drinks more difficult as there is no centralized location for people that enjoy the late hours of night life. Citizens are aware that the target market for tourism has centered around winter visitors in the past, but they are ready to shift the market toward a different demographic. The community believes getting younger people to visit Apache Junction would increase revenue for local businesses and also increase the interest of permanently residing in Apache Junction.

Infrastructure was a topic discussed within the focus group and personal interviews, and many residents agree that there needs to be both new infrastructure and improvement of current infrastructure. One business owner was concerned with the navigation and accessibility to use the attractions they have. Some think that improving or creating better road systems that include more signs to direct visitors toward attractions could be beneficial. A few of the stakeholders mentioned their desire to have a central area or plaza for shopping and recreation that could hold any events. In terms of current infrastructure, there is concern that the lack of consistency in the basic framework of the town makes it unappealing to visitors. An example discussed regarding inconsistency was in the trailer parks and RV homes close to nicer houses. With small improvements, including upkeep around the city, stakeholders anticipate an increase in visitors solely because of the more aesthetically pleasing nature of the town. Overall, stakeholders would like to see more modernization and redevelopment toward the infrastructure they currently have. When discussing the overall appearance of the mobile home parks and downtown areas with multiple interviewees, they all stated that they value the mobile home parks as a residential area; however, they feel the need to become more modern and appealing.

Another concern raised by stakeholders in regards to infrastructure was the lack of restaurant and lodging options available to current and potential visitors. This can be detrimental when it comes to attracting tourists to Apache Junction. One of the local residents mentioned that in the months when winter visitors are in town, there are not enough seats at restaurants for tourists and locals. This causes people to visit restaurants outside of Apache Junction, which results in less profit for local businesses. While there are a select few restaurants in town, stakeholders said a majority are fast-food type restaurants with a limited amount of sit down eateries. Stakeholders conclusively agreed that Apache Junction needs more outlets that offer a large variety of quality food and beverage options. In regards to lodging, stakeholders would like to see more big-name, luxury hotel companies come in to create better accommodation

opportunities for visitors. At this time, most tourists stay at RV parks or in nearby towns that have more lodging options. Stakeholders feel as if having different food, beverage and lodging options will help to increase and diversify tourism in the area.

Many of those interviewed also believe that some form of main attraction needs to be added to the city in order to really bring people in. With a large winter visitor population, the issue of generating more tourism activity in the summer needs attention. This young and diverse group of people want to see a sense of pride within the community. Stakeholders would like something unique to only Apache Junction that people will come and stay for. Some believe that introducing a water park for those brutal summers could yield great potential. Another aspect that the members of the community thought would be useful is expanding on Apache Junction's local history. Promoting historical attractions would allow travelers to learn more information about the town and have a more open view about the destination. These options would only add to all of the amenities that can currently be enjoyed in the area, such as the community space where events are held, biking paths, hiking, and off-roading. Residents agree that keeping people within the city to support other local businesses will happen when new attractions start promoting small businesses around the city.

Stakeholders have a strong feeling that Apache Junction is a city with a lot of potential for growth. Tourism is essential to the city's future as it can become a strong economic generator for the city. After interviewing the Apache Junction community, it was found that community members and other participants would like to do more in terms of upgrading outdoor recreational activities and the renovation and creation of more infrastructure within the city. Those interviewed specified a need toward deciding what tourist demographic should be marketed to, whether it be winter visitors or younger generations. There is a unity among those that participated when it comes to the pride of their city. These community members feel strongly about the improvement and development of the area into a city where plenty of people come to visit and enjoy their stay.

SWOT Analysis

Using the information gathered via a resource assessment of the community (presented in Appendix I) and community engagement, a SWOT analysis was conducted to determine where the community of Apache Junction can best focus its efforts in moving tourism forward. When analyzing a large variety of data, it can be difficult to measure the relevance and importance of each of the characteristics that Apache Junction has to offer. In order to simplify and organize all of the complex data, a factor matrix can be utilized. Two matrices are presented in this SWOT analysis. The first step in creating a factor matrix is identifying important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for tourism Apache Junction. Once these factors are classified by category they are weighed on a scale of 0.00 to 1.00, indicating their level of importance. The lower weighted the least important and the higher the weight the higher the importance. Once the factors are weighed, each factor is rated from 1 (poor) to 4 (good) based on the how the community is addressing them. After the rating of each factor, both the rate and the weight are multiplied, followed by the sum of all the factors. The sum will be a number from 1.0 to 4.0, 1 being the lowest score and 4 being the highest possible score in relation to how the community is doing in relation to tourism. Strengths and weaknesses are presented in an internal

factor matrix (IFE), while opportunities and threats are presented in an external factor matrix (EFE).

Breakdown of calculation for Factor Matrix:

- List 15-20 key internal/external factors
- Weight each factor from 0 to 1.00 such that all weights sum to 1.00
- Rate effectiveness of the destination responding to each factor on a scale from 1 (poor) to 4 (great)
- Multiply the weight by the rating for each factor
- Sum the weighted scores
- Assess Apache Junction's performance in capitalizing on strengths/opportunities and avoiding weaknesses/threats in relation to the range of possible scores (1.0 = lowest possible score, 4.0 = highest possible score)

Strengths:

Apache Junction has a variety of things to offer to visitors, both young and old, families, and groups. Out of all of the assets in Apache Junction some of the most crucial strengths which are: Superstition Mountains, canyon lake, goldfield ghost town, the Renaissance festival, the lost Dutchman days rodeo, cost of living, RV parks, a very involved government, and their ordinance on height restrictions.

Goldfield Ghost Town is one of Apache Junction's extremely popular attractions that offers a look back into history. People can explore the many shops and historic buildings; take an underground guided tour of the historic Mammoth Gold Mine; visit the Goldfield Museum; pan for gold at Prospector's Place; take a ride on Arizona's only narrow-gauge train or witness an old west gun fight performed by the famous Goldfield Gunfighters! The newest attraction added in the area is the Superstition Zip Line which is 120 feet up in the air and gives you a bird's eye view of the Sonoran Desert and an amazing look at the Superstition Mountains. The area also offers Apache Trail Tours, where the travelers can take part in a rugged off road and smooth scenic tour along the many trails or visit a reptile exhibit; try out the Eagle Eye shooting gallery; explore the Mystery Shack; view the Superstition O.K. Corral Stables and Lu Lu's Bordello.

The Superstition Mountains, a popular attraction nearby called "The Superstitions," is a range of mountains in Arizona located to the east of the Phoenix metropolitan area. These mountains are the world-famous icon that separates urban luxury and the wilderness adventure. If the travelers enjoy hiking the traveler can hike endless trails and explore the mountain sides, maybe even come across a bobcat or coyote. If the traveler decides to explore really deep into the 'Superstitions' the traveler may encounter some extreme wilderness and come across a mountain lion or a black bear. If the travelers are not up for this extreme adventure then you can partake in some mountain biking on the trails instead.

Canyon Lake is located just 16 miles from Apache Junction which marks the beginning of the Apache Trail which is one of the most scenic drives in Arizona. The travelers can enjoy all types of activities such as hiking, mountain biking and fishing, catching some rainbow trout, largemouth bass and yellow bass along with many other types of fish.

Apache Junction's cost of living is cheaper on average than many other US locations in many different categories such as groceries, health, housing, utilities and good and services. Cheaper housing is the biggest factor reducing Apache Junction's cost of living. Even though it may not be a direct influence, there is correlation between the cost of living and the tourism

industry. For example, if the cost of living is lower there is a higher chance of young adults either moving to or taking advantage of the low living costs. Given this situation, it allows for people to live and work in Apache Junction instead of having to commute from Mesa or other areas around the valley.

Apache Junction has main events that give them a positive image to visitors such as, the Renaissance Festival. The Renaissance Festival comes yearly, and there is always an economic boost, because it brings in roughly 250,000 visitors, hires about 900-1000 seasonal employees, festival artisans and vendors hire another 150-200 for their festival exhibitions, and significant amounts of tax are produced from the whole event.

On a normal basis, traffic does not exist, but during event time it brings a lot of business to the area, such as supermarkets, gas stations, Walgreens, and especially restaurants. The Renaissance Festival provides a huge exposure to Apache Junction. The event allows visitors who go to the event to witness the beauty of the location, encouraging them to come back to Apache Junction outside of the Renaissance Festival.

Another event that is beneficial to Apache Junction is the Lost Dutchman Days Rodeo. It has high ratings from its event followers and brings in more than 30,000 people annually. The Lost Dutchman Days Rodeo is considered one of the finest rodeos in the Southwest. Although this event does not bring in as much visitors as the Renaissance Festival, it still gives Apache Junction recognition. The rodeo can promote the Lost Dutchman State Park to its visitors, and allows them to see how close Apache Junction is to the location.

The height restriction on Apache Junction building codes will be advantageous to developing hotels in the future as it will help maintain the scenery of the superstitious mountains. The maximum a structure can be built is three stories high, allowing Apache Junction to keep its culture and community feel. According to the Apache Junction City Code, Chapter 1: Zoning Ordinance, the maximum height for RVs, manufactured homes, and accessory structure standards is 15 feet tall. However, this could also be a negative effect on the tourism industry as hotel developers might have different plans and goals for the property. This restriction might also be what is keeping large brand name corporations from building a resort in Apache Junction.

Apache Junction has a lot of RV parks, and is a huge attraction to pull in certain tourists. It is a tourist activity that attracts RV tourists, for example Happy Days RV Park. Happy Days RV Park is an all-year-round active 55+ park, with 180 large, level, full-hookup sites, all with 50-amp service and concrete patios. There is a lot of room for slide-outs, with some sites large enough for a 45' motorhome. A lot of tourists recommend the Desert Queen Family Park as well; it is an outstanding, clean, friendly, well managed, and is an owner operated RV and trailer park.

Weaknesses:

Many topics were taken into consideration to discuss in this weakness analysis, but only the top 10 key factors will be addressed. In this first section of the analysis, a few topics will be discussed, such as the lack of marketing and branding, the low tourism budget, revenue expenditure setbacks in Apache Junction, and finally, the minimal amount of information available for tourists and locals about the city and its major components.

To start, Apache Junction is not heavily marketed and therefore, many people, even those who live in surrounding cities in Arizona, are unaware of what Apache Junction has to offer and what this city is all about. Branding for Apache Junction could be improved to better advertise the community as an old-western town and the interesting history of the city. This was ranked pretty high in the IFE factor matrix because Apache Junction does not seem to have a

distinct image or marketing strategy for themselves in order to gain the attention of the travel industry. If Apache Junction wants to become a tourism destination, this will need to change immediately.

Along with the lack of marketing, there is no official tourism budget, which is crucial when trying to become a tourism destination. If there is no direct budget to spend on tourism infrastructure, it will be extremely difficult to entice people to come to Apache Junction. The city thankfully has a fairly large Parks & Recreation budget, but more funds will need to be allocated towards attractions, accommodations and transportation. The lack of revenue being created during the summer months can be problematic for Apache Junction as well - even the winter visitors and locals spend money elsewhere for entertainment purposes. Budget and revenue are imperative for creating a thriving tourism industry in Apache Junction.

Finally, a look at the fact that Apache Junction does not have a formal Visitor and Convention Bureau to assist tourists and others looking to travel to Apache Junction. This should definitely be a priority of the city, once marketing strategies, budget and revenue weaknesses have been sorted out. Although it is very important to create this resource for tourists, people are still able to find out about certain things in Apache Junction on the city website.

While touring Apache Junction the homeless and drug problem was taken into consideration. The conclusion, however, was that it did not weigh very heavily on the IFE chart due to the fact that there are high amounts of homelessness in other cities with thriving tourism systems. Cities like LA and Las Vegas have large drug problems but it has no direct influence on each city's tourism rates because of the well-known brands and excellent marketing strategies.

Many would say that one of Apache Junction's huge focus is on winter visitors and the seasonality that comes with this demographic. Some would say that this population is more concentrated than it should be for a thriving tourism industry, but a low rating was given because winter visitors are part of the culture of Apache Junction and the goal was never to target or alienate this group of citizens. Another concern for Apache Junction is the older residents being against creating a large tourist population in the area. Expanding their city in a way that will be great for people of all ages will be hard if there is no support from the residents.

Apache Junction has a small service industry. This includes attractions, food and beverage, and lodging. These are fundamental parts of tourism that need to be addressed. There are 5 hotels located in Apache Junction. Many of the hotels have poor ratings on the Internet. This plays a large part in the decision-making process of a tourist. These factors make it difficult for Apache Junction to compete with neighboring cities such as Phoenix where there is a variety of hotels, food and beverage, and attractions. During the winter months the population doubles, forcing food and beverage to operate at their capacity. If that is the case, it is hard to say whether these businesses could support an influx of tourists on top of current locals and winter visitors. This could overwhelm businesses and generate bad experiences for everyone involved. The amount of natural attractions gives Apache Junction potential to become a desirable destination for adventure seekers but there are not enough attractions to make visitors stay in Apache Junction. These factors ultimately determine the revenue brought in by tourism. The longer the tourist stays, the more the money spent within the community increases.

Another setback is that Apache Junction does not have very much appeal from the freeway. People are not aware of the hidden beauty. If proper signs were available it would help visitors navigate their way to attractions and other wonderful facets of Apache Junction. This could also help mitigate traffic during the busy times of the year and help promote the amenities available within Apache Junction. The signage could be greatly improved and could help visitors

utilize all the offerings of Apache Junction.

Apache Junction is a very spread out town, making it difficult to get around. Apache Junction does not currently offer any forms of major public transportation. If a service was made available it could help visitors and locals get around the community with much more ease. Full results of the IFE are Presented below:

Apache Junction Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) Matrix (Strengths/Weaknesses)

Strengths	Weight	Effectiveness	Sum
Superstition Mountains	.10	3	0.3
Canyon Lake	.08	3	0.24
Goldfield ghost town	.07	2	0.14
Renaissance festival	.05	3	0.15
Lost Dutchman State Park	.05	2	0.1
Rodeo	.04	2	0.8
Cost of living	.03	1	0.03
R.V. Parks	.03	3	0.06
Very involved government	.03	2	0.6
Ordinances (3 level high building)	.02	1	0.01
Weaknesses	Weight	Effectiveness	Sum
Little to no marketing or promotion of Apache Junction; No distinct Brand	.08	1	.08
No official tourism budget; rely on expenditures and revenue	.07	1	.07
Lack of attractions, accommodations, restaurants, etc.	.07	1	.07
Low expenditure revenue flow in summer months	.06	1	.06
Lack of accessibility (ie. transportation, things being far apart)	.05	1	.05
Low infrastructure budget (ie. no proper signage in Apache Junction)	.04	1	.04
No official Visitors Bureau and lack of partnering councils in the industry	.04	1	.04
Homelessness and drug problem (“dirty feel”)	.04	1	.04

Market segment too focused (ie. winter visitors)	.03	1	.03
Older residents negative attitude towards Apache Junction becoming Tourist destination	.02	1	.02
		Overall Score:	2.93

Opportunities

The external part of the SWOT assessment is critical in discovering and analyzing the importance of each external factor. The opportunities portion of the analysis is concentrated on examining existing external opportunities that can be used and built upon to draw tourists to the destination. The assessment of opportunities primarily focused on economic, social, cultural, environmental, and competitive factors.

With regards to marketing and promotion, data collected from the resource assessment explained that there is no defined or established brand for Apache Junction. Despite the common themes throughout the various tourism materials (ex. pamphlets, brochures, etc.) and the marketing of the Arizona Office of Tourism, the destination has no brand to identify the destination or the goods and services provided. Therefore, the lack of branding creates an opportunity for Apache Junction to create a brand/logo and motto. This is a foundational piece of marketing communication, that will help the destination achieve a clear message to deliver to target markets and motivate tourists to visit. This opportunity was given a lower weighting due to the fact that while the destination in collaboration with ASU has launched “Positively Apache Junction”, there are no marketing elements to distinguish the destination from others. Creating an identifiable and enticing brand is an important step in outlining Apache Junction’s goals and objectives for tourism as well as help the destination tap into target markets.

Building upon the idea of marketing, since Apache Junction does not have a brand, this also presents an opportunity for the destination to tap into increasing niche tourism market segments. According to World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) niche tourism can be seen as more beneficial to communities as compared to more traditional forms of mass tourism. Niche tourism allows a destination to tailor and selectively pick their markets in ways that will in turn benefit the host community from a development and sustainable standpoint (Robinson & Novelli 2011). The rating of this opportunity was higher than others, since the destination already encompasses many if not all the resources and attractions needed to tap into these markets. For instance, Apache Junction is considered a rural and natural destination, surrounded by numerous mountains, lakes, cliff dwellings, and trails. These natural attractions create the opportunity for the destination to market themselves to adventure and recreational tourists, offering outdoor activities such as biking, kayaking, rock climbing, camping, and hiking. Another essential market niche is Cultural Tourism. There is significant Native American history in Apache Junction as well as an ‘Old West’ atmosphere which was amplified with the destinations early film and motion picture history. An additional untouched market that would also be attracted to culture tourism is Millennials. The “State of the American Traveler” from Destination Analytics, Inc. has shown that 73% of Millennials want to enjoy arts and culture during travel.

Additionally, another essential opportunity for marketing is to increase and maintain the existing target markets, which have been identified as winter visitors. The existing amenities such as RV parks, rentals, recreational and cultural activities currently help maintain these

visitors. Recent studies have also shown Arizona has seen a recent increase in domestic visitation, of the 43 million overnight visitors, 87% were domestic, which overall contributed to a 2.3% increase of tourists in the state (Arizona Office of Tourism). Various economic factors such as the decrease in gas prices, as of today gas prices in Arizona average around \$2.46 to \$2.69 as opposed to \$3.52 in July 2014 (AAA Daily Fuel Gauge Report). This dramatic decrease can be an opportunity for Apache Junction to receive an influx of visitors since the price of domestic travel is down. The rating of this opportunity was given a median score, since the destination currently provides many amenities that cater to the existing markets visiting Apache Junction. One very promising opportunity for Apache Junction to increase their tourism is for them to find a create a target market audience. This would be useful in identifying the target market and who Apache Junction specifically wants to attract as tourists, as right now the town has an open audience. Apache Junction has a variety of markets it could appeal to, including nature and adventure tourists who can come take advantage of the easy access to the Superstition Mountains, or people who enjoy horseback riding or jet skiing. Apache Junction could also try to appeal to a younger crowd, such as millennials, looking to buy their first home and take advantage of the inexpensive home values in the area. The town could even market to folks interested in the “Wild West” feel of the town, all the western movie history in the area, and the annual rodeo.

Another opportunity Apache Junction might use to their advantage would be to create enticing marketing and advertising campaigns, as well as create a social media presence. This would especially appeal to millennials, a previously mentioned open target market. While Apache Junction does currently have a Facebook page and Twitter account, Apache Junction does not appear to be very active. The city itself does not seem to have an Instagram account. Perhaps putting someone in the marketing field in charge of these accounts, sprucing them up and making them more attractive and lively, would bring new tourism to the area.

There is also a big opportunity for investors in Apache Junction, due to the low cost of living. As previously mentioned, there are a lot of areas for investment into the downtown area of the town and bringing in new businesses such as restaurants, shops, and bars. But it could also be an area of interest for people looking to invest in property or second homes, which could also bring in new tourists or at least more money into the local economy. The opportunity for investors is sweetened even more with the “Downtown Incentive District Plan”. The plan aims to attract investors and infrastructure development with relaxed zoning standards, streamlined permit approvals for temporary uses, expanded retail/service uses, reduced parking standards, reduced landscaping standards, and LED signs. This opportunity was ranked fairly high because development of infrastructure is a major point in tourism planning. With the city working to attract developers, there is also the opportunity for tourism specific development. Since there is not much currently in Apache Junction, and the city is willing to work with developers, the developers have the opportunity to in a way set up the city with their own vision. Apache Junction is working with a fairly blank slate, comparatively to other destinations, so they have the opportunity to build infrastructure that is specifically catered to tourism which will only speed up the process of developing Apache Junction as a choice destination. This opportunity is ranked fairly high on the factor matrix because it is an opportunity to speed up the tourism process and could be the difference between seeing a return on investment in 6-8 years versus 10-12 years. One thing, though, is a destination can do as much marketing as they please and bring in as many people as they want, but without the infrastructure to host this influx of

business, more problems will arise when there are not enough resources for these individuals to have a successful experience in Apache Junction.

The opportunity for development of infrastructure ties directly into the next opportunity, the chance to address Apache Junction's unemployment issue. Apache Junction has a 7.4% unemployment rate according to a study done a few years ago, which is about 1.6% higher than the national average (5.8%). The development of infrastructure and new businesses would help address this issue by bringing many new jobs to Apache Junction. This opportunity is ranked moderately because while it may seem like a minor detail, the unemployment rate has a big part in the development of a destination as it can be tied to crime rates and levels of happiness among other things in a given destination.

One last opportunity that Apache Junction has is the marketing opportunity of having the support and proximity to a large Metropolitan area, specifically the Phoenix Metro area. While Apache Junction is fairly secluded and private, there is still the opportunity for tourists to get the exposure to a large city with all the infrastructure, restaurants, and tourism developments that one may desire with just a short drive. Tourists will be able to have the luxury and security of going to a secluded and natural location but know that if the community need anything else, individuals will not be stranded or out of luck because they are so far away and so far secluded that they are stuck and lack certain resources. This opportunity was ranked in a more general sense, and fairly low, because it is more of an afterthought opportunity. This opportunity is more likely mentioned as a side note or a deal sweetener rather than a main focus of the marketing plan.

Threats

One of the higher valued threats on our matrix is the dependency that tourism in Apache Junction has on outdoor activities and events. Although this is a factor that has shown to be an opportunity for the current tourist in Apache Junction, the community could have more built attractions. As mentioned by the locals in interviews, focusing too much on outdoor activities only, could be limited in its scope of attraction. However, with the estimated growth in adventure tourism, there will also be an opportunity for accessing younger generations. Currently, Apache Junction tourism is generally target targeted towards older generations. Social media can be used to engage the attention of the younger market.

Overall, there has been a decrease of tourists visiting Arizona via the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, which is located closest to Apache Junction. The Arizona Office of Tourism states that all other airports in Arizona have grown in travelers except for the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway. This could be a result of the lack of a solid brand for the community. The brand of Apache Junction should be revisited. There does not seem to be a cohesive brand portrayed by the community, which could be off-putting to potential tourists.

In general, there are some negative sentiments towards tourists from older residents of Apache Junction. Stakeholders interviews revealed that the attitudes of the older locals may push tourists away. One way this can be addressed is through community engagement, as currently there is a lack of community engagement in Apache Junction. Communication within the community is important to better understand the general needs of those living there both full time and part time.

Climate and changing gas prices are also important to tourism in Apache Junction. The warm climate during the summers prohibits some outdoor activities during this time. This can affect the wants and needs of tourist when it comes to visiting Apache Junction. Those living in

Arizona looking for new events and activities may not be as negatively affected by the climate as those from out of state. Fluctuating gas prices within the US are also a threat for the simple reason that travelers may not see the benefit or worth of visiting Apache Junction when the cost of driving is high. Apache Junction also has a fairly high sales tax rate. Apache Junction has a 9.10% sales tax, phoenix is 8.6% and Scottsdale is 7.95%. This could discourage travelers from purchasing during their visits to Apache Junction

Finally, the safety of Apache Junction is a concern to some. Overall, the crime rate in Apache Junction is higher than in some neighboring communities. One contributor to this problem could be the overall unemployment rate in Apache Junction, which is higher than the national average. If the community wishes for tourism growth, perceptions of the safety of the community will need to be addressed. Full results of the external factor matrix can be found in the table below.

Apache Junction EFE Factor Matrix (Opportunities/Threats)

Opportunities	Weight	Effectiveness	Sum
Opportunity for commercial and retail development	0.075	3	0.225
Opportunity for investors/developers for tourism specific infrastructure	0.075	1	0.075
Travel in Arizona is going up (Build upon existing markets)	0.075	3	0.225
Opportunity to create a brand/logo and motto	0.05	2	0.1
The increase in employment opportunities tourism brings (opportunity to lower unemployment rate)	0.05	1	0.05
Opportunity to create enticing marketing and advertising campaigns as well as social media	0.05	1	0.05
Niche Tourism markets are growing (ex. Cultural Tourists, Adventure Tourists, Millennials)	0.05	2	0.1
The proximity to amenities of large Metropolitan Areas	0.025	2	0.05
The decreasing cost of gas prices	0.025	3	0.075
Threats	Weight	Effectiveness	Sum
Extremely Dependent on outdoor activities and events	0.075	4	0.3
Lack of communication/motivation from locals	0.05	3	0.15
AJ is limited in brand	0.025	3	0.075
The safety of AJ	0.05	3	0.15
Locals wanting to keep AJ a small community, have a negative outlook on tourism	0.075	4	0.3
Climate negatively affecting tourist	0.025	2	0.05
Cost in AJ is cheaper but the taxes are high	0.05	3	0.15
Decrease of travelers flying to Phoenix/Mesa Airport	0.075	4	0.3
Fluctuating gas prices	0.025	2	0.05

Target market is focusing on older generation	0.05	3	0.15
		Overall Score:	2.63

Strategies for the Future

Primary strategy: Promote outdoor and western brand

Apache Junction currently has a unique blend of access to fantastic outdoor natural resource-based activities and a strong western feel. Capitalizing on these two factors should be a key to branding success in the future. The Superstition Mountains, Goldfield Ghost Town, and Canyon Lake were all noted to be assets in and around Apache Junction; utilizing imagery of these and other similar attractions in branding materials will help solidify Apache Junction's brand. Strengthening this brand will help Apache Junction target growing niche tourism markets.

One niche market that should be targeted in the future is adventure travelers. Adventure travelers seek experiences that go beyond the typical city leisure tours. This market is all about submerging travelers in hands-on activities that require different levels of risk and physical capabilities for hiking, camping, cycling, paddle boating and other activities that take place outdoors. Adventure tourists are classified in three elements that include physical activities, environmental interaction and cultural immersion; based solely on the type of attractions chosen and not the risk or difficulty level of participating in them. As established, Apache Junction already has resources present to market physical attractions in the outdoors environment and a strong culture influenced by western practices, which are vital assets that will help attract adventure tourists the city if marketed as such. It is important for Apache Junction to break into this niche market because adventure tourism is growing quickly across the globe. According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), adventure tourism grew by 37.2% across regions including Europe, North America and South America. Adventure travelers are typically young, with an average age of 36. Adventure travelers read traditional travel publications like National Geographic Traveler, but also lifestyle publications like Cosmopolitan, Men's Health, and Vogue. Adventure tourists are also technologically engaged, as that is how they search for these experiences through online reviews recommending destinations via social media to similar travelers.

Social media marketing can strengthen the influence of Apache Junction's brand and reach the targeted audience by spreading a cohesive message of an outdoor adventure destination. Multi-platform marketing requires frequent interaction on sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, and travel blogs to engage with tourists who are exploring potential travel destinations, sharing their experiences, and expressing concerns. The Apache Junction website should be marketed as the main site to refer to when planning a visit to AJ, and should focus on providing links to dining, lodging and outdoor activities. Social media marketing needs to be integrated into the website by matching campaigns and positive experiences of tourists to project Apache Junction as "hot" destination. Marketing on social media is all about portraying a product or service with images to turn browsers into buyers. In this case, social media will place AJ as a backyard outdoor tourism destination for Arizona residents and a adventure spot for domestic & international tourists.

Some ways to immediately implement social media marketing include:

Goal 1: Increase overall social media activity.

Objective 1- Post at-least four times per week on social platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) as pages are arithmetically organized and could result in less views if posts are not frequent. Posts can be coordinated to project a cohesive brand. Heavily feature images with outdoor activities and western themes.

Objective 2 - Work with Snapchat in creating geofilters and artistic filters to showcase Apache Junction as a destination. Snapchat is a growing form of social media, especially in younger generations. Aim to get featured in the daily stories or featured stories on snapchat.

Objective 3 - Respond to social media posts and comments to official Apache Junction accounts within 24 hours. Engagement with followers is key to gaining new visitors and retaining current ones.

Goal 2: Develop uniformed marketing campaigns that are relevant to domestic and international adventure travelers.

Objective 1 - Create 2-3 marketing campaigns that specifically target adventure travelers. Use social media ad-buys to target younger individuals who engage with adventure travel publications and lifestyle magazines.

Objective 2 - Encourage Renaissance Festival visitors to make more of their trip east by experiencing AJ as a destination with attractions instead of a quick stop-spot for pumping gas. Work collectively with Renaissance Festival organizers to market Apache Junction as a place suitable for hosting attendees.

Goal 3: Collaborate with other AZ tourism organizations to engage with prospective visitors and encourage trips to AJ.

Objective 1 - Co-brand campaigns and hashtags (#) that link Apache Junction to overall tourism for Arizona by following a uniformed marketing strategy.
i.e #MyPHX #VisitArizona #VisitMesa ***#VisitAJ**

Objective 2 - Create weekly social media contests that ask locals and visitors to share their most memorable experiences in AJ by posting photos or written statuses. At the end of the week choose one winner that gets an incentive to re-visit the city and experience one new attraction.

Secondary strategy: Long term tourism resource development

The second strategy to increase tourism in Apache Junction (AJ) has to do with hosting tourists through lodging, dining and entertainment. The main goal for this strategy is to bring familiar brands/companies to the small town of AJ without interrupting the western culture that attracts visitors there in the first place. In order to do that, this strategy suggests developing a resort that highlights the physical landscape of the city and brings in new attraction elements in one place. It would be ideal to develop this resort with a company such as Marriott-Starwood or Hilton because customers are loyal to the brands and trust that the experience is worth the cost

of travel. That would mean that AJ would not be entirely responsible for marketing the resort as a prime destination for tourists and locals, since Marriott-Starwood has a designated team to attract visitors from all across the globe.

Apache Junction already has several hotels and motels to offer to tourists. However, one thing that the city is missing is a major resort that attracts tourists and locals year round. Adding a resort along the base of the Superstition Mountains will give that “wow” factor for those staying at the hotel. Although the Superstition Mountains are not in Apache Junction, it is one of the focal points of the city. Staying in Apache Junction will provide guests with a memorable stay by experiencing the beautiful Arizona sunrise/sunset meeting the mountains. The major hotel chain can later be decided, however a corporate Marriott property would be a nice addition to the city.

The property can be decorated to keep the theme of a Western style town while enhancing the natural beauty that Arizona has to offer. Inside the property there will be a fine dining options offered to guests and locals. Along with the restaurant, a bar can be added to enhance the guest experience and potentially attract a younger crowd or “staycationers.” This gives tourists the ability to enjoy a night life without disrupting the locals which is one of the important points brought up by the citizens of Apache Junction. The hotel can offer night time dancing and live music. On different nights of the week, Western style dance classes can be offered to really heighten the western brand of Apache Junction. Adding a major resort in Apache Junction will also give those who travel there for the Renaissance Festival another, higher end accommodation option.

Secondary strategy: Develop community to accommodate future tourism growth

A long term project that Apache Junction needs to begin planning now is the development of real estate. Development of real estate will help attract younger individuals and families that may be interested in working in a growing tourism industry. Apache Junction is already a hotspot for winter visitors who want to escape the winter climate and enjoy the beautiful Arizona weather from the end of fall through the winter. However, as the tourism industry grows, it will be important to attract additional full-time residents to help build sense of community, contribute to the growing economy, and increase the overall well-being of the town.

In order to attract such people to Apache Junction, there must be a significant development in real estate. The development of condos that are spacious enough to allow people to live comfortably for an extended period of time are essential. Offering amenities such as a pool and fitness center at the minimum, and including common areas with chess boards, cards and book shelves as a place for the local communities to mingle would be outstanding. The objective is to build a community that friends and families of residents want to visit during holidays and school breaks, so incorporating these amenities is important to attract visiting friends and relatives (VFR) tourism, which is the number one reason people travel throughout the world.

Evaluation

As social media is a quickly evolving marketing channel, evaluation of the success of the primary strategy should be continual. A weekly or monthly review of social media engagement, ad campaigns, and co-branding/hashtags should allow Apache Junction to stay on top of any new or ‘viral’ trends. For the secondary, longer term goals, a yearly review should suffice.

Appendix I: Resource Assessment

Economic System

Apache Junction’s economy is unfortunately slightly less developed than most other cities in Arizona and around the United States (Sperling’s Best Places, 2016). The table below illustrates the comparison between the U.S and Apache Junction’s economics statistics.

Comparison between Apache Junction and U.S Economic Statistics		
	Apache Junction	U.S
Unemployment	8.2%	5.2%
Recent Job Growth	3.18%	1.59%
Sales Tax	9.1%	6%
Income Tax	3.36%	4.6%
Income per Capita	\$20,966	\$28,555
Median household Income	\$36,771	\$53,482
Family Average Income	\$44,608	\$65,443

Although job growth is on the rise, Apache Junction still has a relatively high unemployment rate (8.2%) compared to the rest of the United States. According to the City of Apache Junction, by 2020 their average household income will increase to \$57,086, the median household income will increase to \$42,370 and the per capita income will increase to \$25,090; this is still below average compared to the rest of Arizona and the United States (City of Apache Junction, 2016).

Apache Junction’s economy has an above average rate of those that live below the poverty line. 24% of the population is considered to be living in poverty, compared to the national average of 14.7% (Data USA, 2015).

The demographics for these statistics are mainly the white population, followed by Hispanic and Native American. Some of the major employers in Apache Junction are presented in the table below.

Estimate of population working in main employers in Apache Junction	
Employer	Estimate of # of citizens employed
Unified Schools District	800
Wal-Mart	420
City of Apache Junction	285
Apache Junction Medical Center	110
U.S Postal Service	110

More recent data from 2016 breaks down the statistics of industry employment: Education, health care & social assistance (21.7%), retail trade (17.3%), professional, scientific & administrative services (12.3%), manufacturing (10.1%), finance, insurance & real estate (7.7%), arts, entertainment, food & recreation services (tourism sector, 7.6%), construction (7.4%), public administration (4.8%), transportation, warehousing & utilities (3.8%), agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting & mining (1.8%) (azcommerce, 2017).

In 2015, full time male employees made 1.2 times more than female employees making the average male salary \$51,500 and the average female \$42,900 in the state of Arizona. In Apache Junction there are 18,409 females and 17,431 males. The highest age group in Apache Junction are those in the age range of 55 to 59 years old totalling 2,337 people.

The cost of living in Apache Junction is lower than the US average in all of the following categories:

Cost of Living comparison between Apache Junction, Arizona & U.S			
Category	Apache Junction	Arizona	U.S
Groceries	95%	100%	100%
Health	95%	100%	100%
Housing	60%	94%	100%
Utilities	95%	98%	100%
Goods & Services	97%	97%	100%
Transportation	101%	102%	100%

The only category that Apache Junction is more expensive in is transportation. Housing is the biggest factor of the cheaper cost of living in Apache Junction. According to Sperling's BestPlaces, housing is 87% more expensive in Prescott than it is in Apache Junction. In comparison to the average housing prices for the nation, Apache Junction is 14% lower and 12% lower than Arizona. The price of daily goods and services is a valuable and reliable number to be aware of when considering the general price of the city's goods. In the case of Apache Junction, the price of goods and services are 1% lower than the average of Arizona, as well as 4% lower than the nation's average (Council for Community and Economic Research, 2016). The median home value in Apache Junction is \$87,500 which is much lower than the average national median home value at \$178,600. Median rent is also significantly lower in Apache Junction at \$735 in comparison to the nation's median rent of \$928. In Apache Junction, 71% of people own homes while only 29% rent them.

Although cost of living in Apache Junction is cheaper when compared to other places in Arizona, the taxes could be considered high. Apache Junction has a 9.10% sales tax which consists of 2.40% Apache Junction tax, 1.10% Pinal County sales, and 5.60% Arizona state sales tax. This makes it higher than the combined sales tax for Phoenix which is 8.6% and higher than other sales tax in the area – such as, Mesa 8.05%, Peoria 8.1%, Scottsdale 7.95%, and Gilbert 7.8%.

Social Context

History of the Community

The city of Apache Junction, located near the Superstition Mountains at the junction of historic Apache Trail and SR 88 or Idaho road and US 60 , was incorporated on November 24, 1978. The city is rich in history, reflecting Arizona's Western heritage. The Apache Trail begins and ends in Apache Junction, but its circle route takes people through 120 miles of deserts, mountains, by cliff dwellings, along lake shores, through old mining towns, and through beautifully eroded canyons.

With roots to the old west mining camps, Apache Junction has a long and colorful history of Spanish Conquistadors, ancient Native American cultures, the mysteries and lore of the Superstitions where the hunt for the "Lost Dutchman's Gold Mine" still continues. Today, Apache Junction is a convergence of a western frontier with a growing contemporary marketplace. With its hometown, rural feel next to wilderness territory and close proximity the amenities of the nation's fifth largest city of Phoenix, Apache Junction is truly a melding of both old west with modern living (Apache Junction History, 2017).

Overall Population Demographics

According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has an area of 34.2 square miles (89 km²), all land. As of the census of 2016, there were 39,954 people, 15,574 households, and 9,372 families residing in the city (Branch, G. P., 2012). The population density was 929.3 people per square mile (358.9/km²). There were 22,771 housing units at an average density of 665.1 per square mile (256.8/km²). The age within Apache Junction varies throughout the entire city. In 2010, the population had 23.83% of their people under the age of seventeen, 19.12% between eighteen and thirty-four, 22.96% between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-four, 9.93% between age fifty-five and sixty-five, 12.81% between sixty-six and seventy-four and 11.35% seventy-five years of age and older. The racial makeup of the city was 89.5% White, 1.2% Black or African American, 1.1% Native American, 0.8% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 4.9% from other

racess, and 2.4% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 14.4% of the population (Data Access and Dissemination Systems, 2010).

Historical and Cultural Sites

When it comes to filmmaking in Apache Junction, the Superstition Mountain area has played a major role in the industry since Jon Dored, a camera operator for the Southern Pacific Railroad, filmed the first commercial motion picture of Roosevelt Dam, the Apache Trail and Tonto National Monument on November 18, 1910. Dored shot 850 feet of film during his stay in the area. Several film shorts were shot in the area between the years 1910 and 1920 (Filmmaking in Apache Junction, 2017). Actors and actresses from around the world have worked on sets beneath the facade of the Superstition Mountain. Movie greats such as Glenn Ford, Ida Lupino, James Stewart, Audie Murphy, Jack Holt and Tom Mix have starred in films shot on location in the area. Singers such as Marty Robbins, Elvis Presley, Kenny Rogers and Waylon Jennings have also done some films at Apacheland.

Overall Feel of the Community

The overall atmosphere of the community is divided amongst a large seasonal population of people leaving harsh winters in the Midwest region of the United States and Canada and the year-long residents. Many Arizona locals view it as a minor stop between destinations and not as a tourist area. Overall, it is said that Apache Junction's downtown area gives off the small town feel and the natural attractions are important to the residents of Apache Junction. Additionally, Apache Junction is behind competitors, Queen Creek and Mesa, when it comes to the attractions available to residents and tourists coming into the city (Living in Apache Junction, 2017). According to Niche, the safety of Apache Junction was rated a C+ overall. There are many crimes associated with theft and robbery. Out of the twenty eight reviews on Apache Junction, twenty seven experiences are rated average, very good or excellent. Niche describes Apache Junction as a suburban area, but the rating for families is a C+ grade. (Resident, C., & User, N, 2017). Apache Junction is seen as a city with potential. Overall, the grading was very much the same when it came to resident and tourist opinions on Apache Junction.

Government Policy

Government is actively involved in promoting and supporting tourism. The government also provides the infrastructure, develops tourist attractions and experiences, supports festivals and events and the implementation of tourist promotion plans. The government is really important in tourism because it has the greater sense of vision, competitive market intelligence, access to resources, etc. to bring in great performances which attract target market to visit the destination. (Government Apache Junction, 2017). The government can be used as a resource for tourism development in multiple ways. First, government entities can provide the coordination between tourism organizations to create public private partnerships in order to facilitate faster and smoother progress for tourism development. Next, governments are involved with regulations that can help or hurt tourism planning. With the cooperation of the government, zoning and districting and other development controls can be passed that organize tourism development properly. The government can also influence tourism by promotion through market research or stimulation through financial incentives for development. Also, the industry needs to

partner up with the councils to ensure the council has the right information of the infrastructure that will satisfy the demands and expectations of the visitors

The city of Apache Junction was formed and incorporated under the laws of the State of Arizona with seven members elected at-large, on a non-partisan basis. The City Council will provide the community with responsible political leadership, high level of services and quality of life for the community. (Government Apache Junction, 2017) The City Manager is appointed by the City Council to enforce city laws, direct the operations of city government, prepare and manage the municipal budget and implement the policies and programs initiated by the City Council. The City Clerk's office administers the City's privilege tax collection, audit and licensing programs. It provides public notices, maintains city ordinances and resolutions, and administers the city archives and public records program. It is also responsible for the City Council and committee meetings, monitoring state campaign finance law compliance and elections with Federal, State and local laws. The budget of Apache Junction City Council is adopted by estimating the revenue and expenditures of the following fiscal year. The city staff can legally expend funds for the services and programs provided to the community with the adopted budget. The budget represents the City Manager's and City Council's commitment to provide for the most important citizens needs. Government prepares budgets in order to manage their finances properly (Compass-Insights into Tourism Branding, 2017). Governments provide facilities and public services to meet their citizens' needs which are paid for with public funds. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990 to ensure people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in all aspects of American life. The ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability. The City of Apache Junction will ensure that its programs, services, and activities are readily accessible and usable by qualified person with disabilities (Local Government And The Visitor Industry, 2016). The city of Apache Junction is committed to assisting businesses in creating jobs and income opportunities for all segments of the population, providing efficient and attentive customer service, promoting redevelopment and infill, and improving the quality of life for residents, visitors and employees.

Destination Brand & Demand

Apache Junction does have an established brand and can be looked at from several different perspectives. Looking through the various pamphlets, billboards, and other advertising material the city releases, a common theme begins to stand out. Apache Junction can be seen as an outdoor oasis with an old western vibe to it. The Arizona Office of Tourism states that if one is looking for an, "Outdoor Adventure" then the population interested should head east and visit Apache Junction. (Apache Junction OSVG, 2016). The city also includes various pictures of outdoor activities such as rock climbing and biking, thus branding Apache Junction as a place that outdoor enthusiasts will love. The airport ad for Apache Junction has a very old western feel to it; with a background filled with mountains, cacti, and a sunset, along with a silhouette of a horse drawn carriage and a 1950's style car. Another ad that Apache Junction released was one telling the legend Elisha Marcus Reavis and the run in with the Apache Indians with the ad ending with the phrase, "Come Explore Our Legends." (Arizona RV Guide Elisha Marcus Reavis, 2017). In these two promotional ads, it's clear that Apache Junction is a town with the feeling of the old west, where visitors can come explore what it was like in those times and visit places such as Gold Field Ghost town or come during the Lost Dutchman Days Festival.

While Apache Junction is heavily branded as a vintage old west town with various outdoor activities, another thing the city is advertised as is being an RV town (Apache Junction Road Trip RV Guide, 2015). Many promotional materials released by Apache Junction and the state of Arizona feature various pictures of RV's or details about the RV parks and services in the area. Overall, the promotional materials and ads the city and other tourism related businesses released brands the city in a positive light, highlighting its unique attractions and what makes the city special. In the eyes of communities outside of Apache Junction the brand of the city can be different. Apache Junction can sometimes be associated and branded as a place with a high crime rate and drug use (Hoyt, 2015). Others see Apache Junction as a metaphorical ghost town, where besides the outdoor activities, it's seen as lacking in other forms of entertainment. The fact that Apache Junction is viewed as an RV town is often seen as a positive, especially for those who either live in them or enjoy taking trips in them. However, being an RV town can also be seen as a negative; showing that the city may be lacking in money and other important resources. Therefore, making the demand for travel more for adventurous or spontaneous day trips for outdoor activities in Apache Junction. The Apache Junction AZ Office of Tourism Center had reported that an annual 35,000 visitors come through every year as it's the sixth most visited center in Arizona (Apache Junction, Arizona. Arizona Office of Tourism, 2015). With winter climates dropping from the hot summer days, Pinal County had stated, "Apache Junction attracts upwards of 40,000 winter visitors and retirees annually due to it's climate and proximity to many of Arizona's outstanding recreational and historical areas". (Pinal County, 2017). This is stating that Apache Junction is in demand for adventure seekers whose ages range as there's sightseeing and hiking and many more touristy activities.

Although there is a stigma of being run down and overloaded with RV parks, Apache Junction has visitors from all over the nation and is popular for day trips for Arizonian locals. The Superstition Mountain Range brings in a wide variety of people from hikers and campers, to those learning about Apache Junction's history. Some of the most popular attractions in Apache Junction according to reviews on Trip Advisor are, The Lost Dutchman State Park, Barleens Arizona Opry, Goldfield Ghost Town, Superstition Mountain Museum, Apache Trail Tours, and the Superstition Zip line as all of these lead to adventurous activities people engage themselves into while they visit the great city of Apache Junction (The Top 10 Things to Do in Apache Junction, 2017). Apache Junction attracts a diverse type of crowd which makes sense given the multiple marketing and branding strategies currently in use. A diverse message is not always a bad platform to take in marketing, however, as Apache Junction moves towards target marketing it might benefit tourism to increase marketing in certain areas and decrease in others. For example, targeting adventure travelers would put an emphasis on social media marketing about the natural attractions and activities in the area. This target market would need a de-emphasis in marketing for the RV parks in the community. Overall, diverse marketing is not negative, but targeting certain types of tourists with specific branding can have a more effective outcome.

Physical Resources

The United States Census bureau states that Apache Junction has an area of 34.2 square miles being all land. Apache Junction has an elevation of 1,722 feet (Apache Junction Latlong USA, 2017). According to the Apache Junction website they have six parks; Complex Park, Silly Mountain Park, Flatiron Park, Prospector Park, Superstition Shadows Park, and Veteran's Memorial Park. Apache Junction also has a skate park (Apache Junction: The gateway to the Superstition Mountains, 2017)

Highway 60 passes through Apache Junction, it is the heart of transportation in and out of Apache Junction. It brings people from Phoenix, Mesa, Chandler, and Gilbert to Apache Junction. It is the main highway people use to get to Apache Junction. People have to drive through Apache Junction on their way towards Eastern Arizona. Highway 60 is a great resource to use to attract people to stop and stay longer in Apache Junction. Ease of transportation is very important to many tourists when choosing a destination. Highway 60 essentially puts Apache Junction on the map because it makes access to the town much easier for tourists. Apache Junction will be picked as a destination because of its strength in natural attractions, western town vibe, etc, but the Highway 60 is an advantage because it keeps tourists from feeling isolated.

The average temperature in Apache Junction is 71.3 degrees fahrenheit. The annual high temperature is 85.3 degrees fahrenheit, while the annual low temperature is 57.3 degrees fahrenheit. The month of July averages the highest temperature in Apache Junction at 105 degrees fahrenheit and the month of January and December average the coldest at 42 degrees fahrenheit. Apache Junction's average annual precipitation-rainfall is 13.21 inches (Data U.S Climate, 2017). Apache Junction gets no snowfall.

The closest airport to Apache Junction is the Williams Gateway Airport. The Williams Gateway airport is 16.5 miles away from Apache Junction. It has 3 runways but is a designated foreign trade zone and a military reuse zone. The next closest airport the Apache Junction is the Sky Harbor International Airport. The Sky Harbor Airport is 33 miles away, it consists of 3 runways and does 1,500 arrivals and departures (Apache Junction Latlong USA, 2017).

Public Infrastructure - When visiting Apache Junction there is a noticeable favor for mobile homes and trailer parks, in fact nearly 63% of occupied real estate in AJ are mobile homes. A great first stop in Apache Junction for someone looking to start exploring the area is at the Apache Junction Chamber and Commerce visitors center. Here, visitors can get any questions about the city answered, as well as finding plans for a day's adventure. The city of Apache Junction is equipped with the resources to meet the needs and living standards of the locals and visitors (Apache Junction, AZ, USA, 2017). Apache Junction homes six schools in its district, four schools are elementary, one junior high, and one high school. The city also homes Central Arizona College which has been recently expanded and upgraded. The state of the art library in Apache Junction comes equipped with the resources needed for people when doing research and wanting to learn more on the area. The Superstition Mountain Museum is one of the town's most popular tourist destinations, visitors to this museum will get to learn about historic artifacts, as well as take a tour of the old Apacheland movie set structures (Apache Junction, AZ, USA).

Natural Resources - Apache Junction is considered to be the home of the beautiful Arizona mountain range known as the Superstition Mountains. Locals and visitors can enjoy and experience various outdoor activities such as hiking and sightseeing. With the city and surrounding area of Apache Junction being so rich in history visitors want to experience all it has to offer. A great way to do that is by making use of a tour company called Apache Trail Tours. With popular activities such as 4x4 off-roading the various Sonoran Desert trails, searching for gold in the Superstition mountains, to exploring the famous Apache Trail, this jeep tour will take you on many different adventures, to fit diverse needs of people visiting the area. Apache Junction is also home to the Lost Dutchman State park. Visitors to this state park can enjoy different outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, biking, and camping. It is said that at this location, people experience one of the best views of the Superstition Mountains.

Tourism Industry

Apache Junction has many already existing tourism attractions. One of the biggest attractions is being known as the Goldfield Ghost Town (Apache Junction, AZ, USA, 2017). There are many appeals to tourists within this little ghost town. Apache Junction offers a museum, restaurants, shops, trails, adventures, a reptile exhibit, and even tours of the old Goldfield Mine (AJcity, 2017)!

One of the newest attractions Apache Junction has to offer is the Superstition Zip Line. This zip line takes you 120 feet into the air and gives you a bird's eye view of the Sonoran Desert, an amazing look at the Superstition Mountains, and an overhead view of Goldfield Ghost Town. It is a two-person zip line so friends or couples can ride and enjoy the thrill and view together (Superstition Zip Line, 2017). Also aiming towards adventure tourists, Apache Junction has trail tours which offers 4x4 off road desert tours for wilder customers, or a smooth tour in a jeep through the scenic canyon with a nature walk along Fish Creek Hill. One can even go on a tour where you learn how to pan for gold (Apache Trail Tours, 2017).

For the less adventurous tourists, Apache Junction offers many shows such as the Goldfield Gunfighters. The Goldfield Gunfighters show an authentic reenactment of the Old West every Saturday and Sunday from November to April. Tourists love this event, in fact 22,714 visitors have come to enjoy their show (Goldfield Gunfighters, 2017). People can also visit the Superstition Reptile Exhibit where you can get a look at the many reptiles and invertebrates of the Sonoran Desert (Superstition Mountain Museum, 2017). For a more musical night you can visit Barleens Arizona Opry where Apache Junction offers everything from rock and roll to country to classical and everything in between. Musicians, comedians, and entertainers perform here and you are even provided a meal. This show has been reviewed as “A classic family friendly show” (AJcity, 2017). Apache Junction’s most visited tourist attraction is the Superstition Mountain Museum. Tours are offered to visitors so they can see and learn about the artifacts and history of the Superstition Mountains, the past of Apache Junction, and much more about the surrounding area (Superstition Mountain Museum, 2017).

Even though there are lots of ideas and emerging attractions towards growing the tourism industry in Apache Junction, there are still various problems with the current tourism industry. TripAdvisor is a website that is commonly used to review and look at hotels and other tourism destinations based on previous visitors. Good reviews leads to a high population visiting, however sometimes a negative review can also decrease attendance. There are only approximately 19 hotels in Apache junction and they are very minimal in comparison to the cities around, not just in size but also in quality. According to various reviews from TripAdvisor which is a commonly known third party travel website, guests that have stayed at the “best hotels” in Apache Junction have commented and left rather negative reviews. The room being “musty and smelling” and “not getting the TV to work” are not common expectations of accommodations, especially if someone is paying money to stay somewhere (TripAdvisor, 2017). In addition to the lack of lodging it seems that the reputation that the attractions have are also not ideal for a tourism destination. Cherie form Las Vegas posted on trip advisor that she was “disappointed again” as she claimed she called ahead of their trip to assure that everything in Apache Junction would be open however when her and her husband arrived, everything was closed. She had visited Apache Junction in the past and was hoping to see a boom in the city especially through the tourism industry however she was disappointed and claimed she wouldn’t return again (TripAdvisor, 2017).

After some extensive research of looking for an existing tourism plan, there is currently no evidence or previous tourism plan that will address the kind of tourists Apache Junction wants to attract. Apache Junction as a city has very high potential to have the tourism industry grow as far as location and natural resources. It is ideal for the tourism industry to take what it has and turn it into the next “Sedona” as long as there is a clear distinction of who Apache Junction wants to attract and how the community will do so.

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PRESENTATION SLIDES AND NOTES FROM FALL 2017 SHOWCASE

View the whole presentation at <https://vimeo.com/247838446>

Fall 2017 Partnership with Apache Junction

ASU Project Cities AJ Tourism Plan

TDM 372 - Tourism Planning

Siena Muller, Rocio Sanchez, Diana Hernandez – Students of Dr. Evan Jordan



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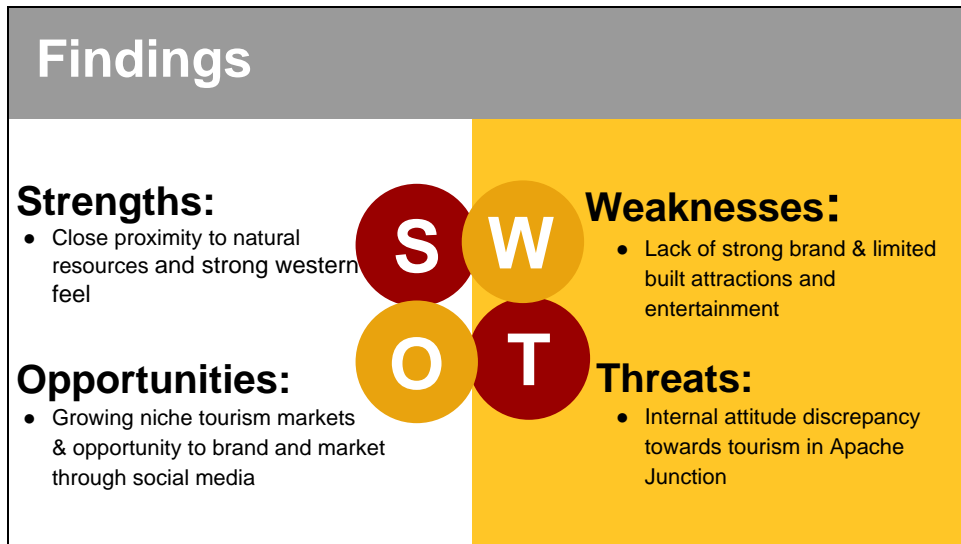
Presentation Outline

- Goals/Objectives
- Findings
- Suggestions
- Implementation
- Additional Considerations

Goals & Objectives

Goal: Identify issues that are key to increasing Apache Junction's visibility as a tourism destination

Objective: Create a tourism plan to help identify next steps to strengthening Apache Junction's tourism brand



Presentation notes:

- AJ is currently known as an “outdoor oasis” but it is lacking entertainment.
- Strength - proximity to natural resources/attractions
- Weakness - lack of a strong brand, lack of man-made attraction and entertainment
- Opportunity - growing niche tourism markets and opportunity to brand and market through social media.

Suggestions

Maintain and Increase Outdoor and Western Brand

Make use of the resources already present in/near Apache Junction

Market accessibility of natural resource attractions

Expand marketing toward adventure tourists

Presentation notes:

- Successful brands build long-term marketing plans targeted towards a specific market to promote services that meet specific demands
- Use what is already there: Ghostfield Ghostmine, Canyon Lake, imitate those attractions across AJ
- Young travelers are influencing trends in tourism and becoming more affluent, which means that destinations need to tailor services to that market sector as it will directly contribute to the increase/decrease of tourism visitors in specific destination.

Strengthen brand - the activities are the gateway to the AJ

- Gateway to Superstition Mountains - gateway to activities

Why adventure tourists?

Adventure travel market growing in both number of travelers and average spending

Adventure travelers...

Are young – average age 36

Plan their travels online and recommend trips via social media

Read traditional travel publications like National Geographic Traveler, but also popular media publications like Cosmopolitan, Vogue, and Men's Health

Implementation

Multi-platform marketing to **reach target market**, that includes:

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and travel blogs

Including frequent posting and interaction

Integrate social media into the Apache Junction website

Potential to market via lifestyle magazines/websites

Continue to work with #VisitAZ and #VisitPHX on co-branding

Presentation notes:

- Social media can strengthen the influence of a brand/destination by spreading a message cohesively through platforms that are commonly used by tourists to discover new travel destinations.
- Work with established travel/tourism agencies such as Visit AZ/Phx to follow a uniformed online presence that can be easier to recognize and match the overall theme/attractions of AZ and AZ deserts.

Data from resource and community engagement

**Long Term Items
to Consider
for
Accommodating
Future Tourism
Growth**

Lodging

- Develop branded hotels
- Many online hotel reviews project Apache Junction in a negative light
- Develop long term stay options

Food and Beverage

- Continue to develop a downtown area
- Work to add a variety of restaurants

These will help increase marketability to new demographics

Presentation notes:

- In order to market AJ as a tourism destination, they must have enough space/rooms to accommodate tourists as numbers are expected to increase with this new way of branding AJ and attract visitors through loyal memberships with popular hotel brands
- Lodging should ADD to the experience & leave tourist with the urge to visit again **return business is formed through the relationship/services of the provider and customer.
- Snowbird/Extended stay housing is not advertised heavily which makes it difficult to maintain and grow the amount of tourists staying in AJ. Long-term stays bring revenue through different markets: food, entertainment, transportation and lodging
- A designated area for F&B and entertainment can be developed in a downtown hub as most cities create these settings to attract people into one place that “has it all”

**Long Term Items
to Consider
for
Accommodating
Future Tourism
Growth**

Build Community

- Establish places for new tourism employees to live
- Create family-friendly communities
- Create events to bring together full time and winter residents

This will help attract new employees for a growing tourism industry

Presentation notes:

- Property tax is at 0% -- Good for first time homeowners aka tourism employees
- Implementing new zoning laws to create are city plan for residential areas, RV parks, condos, and then business
- Apache Junction needs zoning combined with real estate development to reach their goals as a tourism destination

Thank you!

Questions? Contact Dr. Jordan -
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Apache Junction Visitor's Website Research

Recommendation Report

TWC 544—Team 2

Kassidy Arias, Maya Toteva, Jennifer Williams

September 22, 2017

Introduction & Research Questions

The City of Apache Junction and Project Cities are partnering with Arizona State University to improve the city's image and enhance their online presence. This study will be analyzing the Apache Junction website for Visitors with the goal of improving the user experience.

The Apache Junction Visitors website targets potential visitors who may be looking for information about the city. The goal for this project is to use systematic, human-centered research practices to identify critical user needs and recommend design improvements. To accomplish this, the team will implement various usability methods, such as comparative analysis of sites similar in size to the City of Apache Junction, in person and remote usability testing, user interviews, surveys, and card sorting.

Our team considered the following research questions:

- Who is the intended user?
- What are some usability pain points within the current site design?
- Do visitors get the information they are looking for when visiting the site?
- Do users think the website is easy to use?
- Can the user complete the task they are looking for?

According to Krug (2014), a website should have the following attributes: useful, learnable, memorable, effective, efficient, desirable, and delightful. Unfortunately, feedback by users consistently indicated that the current website design is confusing, difficult to navigate, ineffective in helping users to achieve their tasks, time consuming, and visually flat.

User Research Results

This study focused on understanding the user behaviors, motivations, and needs through observation techniques, task analysis, and other feedback methodologies. In what follows, we describe the results of our user research project by method.

Content Audit

Content auditing allowed for a first look at the website with unbiased eyes. This method gave us the opportunity to catalogue the content of the website ourselves and gain understanding of what parts function well and which do not. This was helpful because the team got acquainted with the design features, information architecture, and content, which helped to form an idea of what could potentially lead to confusion and difficulties with navigation. Content audit is the logical first step in any user experience evaluation because it delivers helpful insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the website through cataloguing and evaluating its content.

Through a content audit done by the research team, items like broken links and search issues became evident. For visitors to the site (especially for the first time), there are flaws that are obvious. Where is the information on the city and history? Where is the information on

hotels and restaurants if I was coming to stay and visit? Links to key pages are broken and information that potential visitors may want to find cannot be located easily, causing frustration. We live in an information world where users need answers and need them quickly (this is why people love Google). A city's visitor website should have information about accommodations and things to do readily available for the customer of the website.

One team member doing a content audit specifically was looking for the Mining Camp Restaurant and was not successful in finding the information on the Things to Do page or within the site's internal search engine. The restaurant, which has been a popular tourist attraction since the 1960's, should be easy to find on the site for the visitor. Recently, the restaurant burned to the ground—and this information is necessary to capture for a visitor to the city. Also, the content audit found that links on the Things to Do page opened up into the same tab or page instead of a new tab. This became challenging to keep track of what links had already been clicked onto.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis showcases to researchers design and content elements that work or don't work from both a user's and expert's perspective. It helps to discover how a website functions in relation to competitors (Schade, 2015). This analysis was a chance for the team to benchmark the design, content, and architecture of Apache Junction's Visitor site in comparison to other city websites. The team attempted to keep with cities that have a similar population to that of Apache Junction for a more accurate comparison. There were similar sites with more organized information, better architecture, and more impactful image displays. The team was able to visualize where the Apache Junction site could improve.

A comparative analysis can be either more comprehensive or more fixated. Researchers can compare websites by rank and metric or by site elements and design (Schade, 2015). The team chose to complete a more focused comparative analysis of Apache Junction vs. Wake Forest, NC and Sierra Vista, AZ. All cities have an approximate population of 40,000.

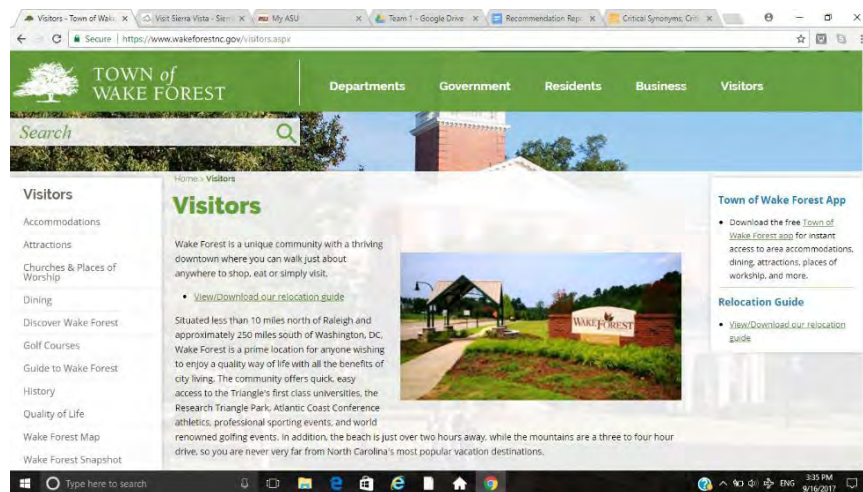
Wake Forest

The Wake Forest, NC (<https://www.wakeforestnc.gov/visitors.aspx>) website appears to be very similar in design to the Apache Junction website. Both have a top bar with main site navigation items and a sidebar with section specific navigation items. There is a large background image with an opaque overlay allowing the text to be readable for the user. Due to the similarities in design, particular elements of each site can be better compared.

The Wake Forest website uses a green color to indicate links. Use of an icon symbolizes external web links, and these links launch into a new tab. The headings, green and bold, allow the content to be easily scannable. This could be best for when a user is in a hurry to find information. Although, there is more content overall, and many more words, there are maps demonstrating location of events, activities, parks, etc.

Recommendation Report

Figure 1



Sierra Vista

Sierra Vista, AZ. <http://visit.sierravistaaz.gov/> website is very intuitive and appealing. It uses minimalist design principles. It seems to be user friendly with large pictures and tabs at the top that take the user to options like See & Do, Dining and Lodging, Events and Visitor Information, etc. The cities contact information is at the top of the page. In his book, Krug (2014) states that contact information at the top of a website allows the user or target audience to feel comforted for instances when they need to get a hold of you. The site is organized well with drop down menus that take you to the information with ease, like hiking, which was difficult to find on the Apache Junction site. The Sierra Vista site has their own drop down for Dining & Lodging, with submenus of different kinds of restaurants and different types of lodging. There is also a See & Do tab which is categorized by outdoor activities, family activities, parks and sports. This makes it very easy to look for information on the site.

Figure 2



Usability Testing and Interviews

The usability testing method provided the team with a first-hand understanding of user-to-website interaction. It is suggested to test around five users for the best outcome, as such testing reveals about 85% of problems (Nielsen, 2000). The team tested six users. It was the most powerful method used by the team, as it provided a strong understanding of how easy or difficult it is for users to complete particular tasks on the site. The method was completed both in-person and remotely.

Remote usability testing seemed to excavate more issues related to the functionality and usability of the website. The team was able to zoom into a specific issue and observe the user logic while navigating through the website, hear the pain points, comments, and general feedback.

The in-person interviews combined with usability tests were personable and gave the interviewer the chance to intercede and ask additional questions based on the answers from the user. Furthermore, the opportunity to observe the user's behavior directly was beneficial for the research because it added another qualifying component, such as body language. The team was able to gain valuable insights related to the site's content and architecture—such as issues with switching of left-hand navigation, launch of external links, and lack of activity information.

Interviews completed prior to usability tests provided the team with knowledge of user types. Interviews were thought of as, “conversations with a purpose,” between the user and researcher, uncovering user demographics, preferences, and thoughts (Rogers, Sharp, & Preece, 2011). The questions asked about site expectations, site design thoughts, and Apache Junction stereotypes (if any). As part of the interviews, the participants were represented with a Microsoft Desirability Toolkit to Test Visual Appeal, first created by Joey Benedeck and Trish Miner in 2002. A predetermined list of adjectives—both positive and negative—allowed participants to choose what best represented their thoughts on the site's design and functionality from a glance. This helped the team indicate the website aesthetics from the users' view (Meyer, 2016). Some chosen words from participants are listed below.

- Stressful
- Busy
- Hard-to-use
- Unpredictable
- Uncontrollable
- Useful
- Appealing
- Ordinary
- Boring

While observing user interaction during usability testing, it was clear where they prevailed and where they struggled. Once logged on to the Apache Junction Visitors website, <https://www.ajcity.net/31/Visitors>, users had trouble finding places to go for items such as hiking, hotels, restaurants and shopping—typical scenarios and tasks given to users. During remote usability testing more than one user decided they could not find hiking information easily, specifically looking on the Things to Do and Parks and Recreation pages. Some users tried the search function on the website, however it took users to locations that did not provide helpful information. Terms like “hiking” returned information about Group Fitness Instructors. Terms like “hotels” returned links to liquor information and rental properties. In other instances, participants chose to use Google as an alternative after the search option did not return any valuable information. According to Nielsen (2012), “if users get lost on a website, they leave. If a website’s information is hard to read or doesn’t answer users’ key questions, they leave.” Therefore, our users felt as if they were lost and unable to answer key questions, looking for Google as an alternative. This showcases a major usability issue.

Links were a pain point for many users. One user claimed that the links were undescriptive of destination. Another user stated that the external website links should launch into a new tab—this was later confirmed to be a better user experience in the team’s survey. A third user declared that the site was similar to an Easter egg hunt, as one link just leads to another and another. This same user gave up during a task relating to park location, as they were just clicking links which lead them in circles. The left-side navigation menu links in particular gave 100% of users difficulty. When clicking navigation items, such as Parks and Recreation, the entire left-side navigation changes. Breadcrumb links at the top of some internal visitor pages were undescriptive of user navigation, therefore, many users had to click a back arrow to return to the previous page.

Destinations, maps, and event descriptions were pointed out as missing by every user during the usability testing. Although a map appears on the Parks and Recreation page navigating to the department itself, there are no maps to parks, hiking trails, or any other events—at least not easily found. Users found frustration in locating these items.

Participants mentioned that some items seemed to be geared more towards the residents than a visitor, such as Jobs/Volunteer, Adopt a Pet, and City Council Information.

Surveys and Card Sorting

Usability testing allowed the team to pinpoint the struggles of the user, but there was a need for more basic understanding of the users’ needs and wants. Paired with the card sort, the survey provided the team an opportunity to gather more information about user wants without investing a lot of time. It told the team a lot about the pain points and preferences with the Apache Junction site, such as design thoughts, link destination preferences and content expectations.

Card sorting is a useful tool to determine how users organize and categorize information (Affairs, 2013). In the case of the Apache Junction Visitors website, it helped to determine what an improvement to the existing structure of the website might look like. The team chose to use the Optimal Sort platform for its ease of use for both the researchers and the users. As

recommended by Usability.gov the best practices for card sorting is about 30-40 cards, using an open sort method, and making sure to give your participants a time frame for completion. For this study, an open sort with 30 cards and a survey were used with the estimated time frame of 10 minutes for participants to complete the study. Users grouped cards together by categories using the 30 cards with all the cards being associated with terms from the Apache Junction Visitors website. Although every user categorized differently, the results were similar enough to help the team determine a recommended site architecture.

Prior to completing a card sorting activity, participants were asked to complete a survey. The survey was intended to validate design, content, and architecture concerns by researchers. Results showed, once again, that users would like to see hotels, restaurants, and shopping locations on the website. The team also learned that 50% of the participants found the website to be neither easy nor difficult to navigate, and 50% found that it is neither easy nor difficult to find the Things to Do page. Most the users described the site as stressful, complex, confusing, hard to use, uncontrollable, and unpredictable—based on the Microsoft Desirability Toolkit (2016).

Seven people completed a remote survey and card sort. Figure 3 shows an example of a card sort received from a participant. There were very similar groupings found from the users, such as maps, things to do—indoor and outdoor activities—calendar of events, and seasonal activities.

Figure 3

OPTIMAL WORKSHOP Dashboard Studies Upgrade Kessidy Arias

Card Sort for

Heads up! As a Free Plan user, you'll get limited access to some features.

Overview Analysis Participants Questionnaire

Your Participants

0 Selected Reload results using

PARTICIPANT

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

[Upgrade this study to see more](#)

Participant 2

prev next

Details Questionnaire **Card Sort** Include

Calendar of Events 4

- Calendar
- Seasonal Activities
- Children's Activities
- Renaissance Festival

Great Outdoors 5

- Hiking Trail Maps
- Hiking Trails
- Horseback Riding
- Fishing
- Camping

Maps 2

- Biking Trail Maps
- City Map

Places Nearby to Visit 3

- Nearby Arizona Sites to See
- Canyon Lake
- Superstition Mountain Museum

Places to Stay 1

- Hotels / Accommodations

Think like a local 6

- Local Parks
- Volleyball
- Golfing
- Gym
- Fitness Programs
- Senior Center

to 7 of 7 participants

Support Blog Inner: 1.51 Outer: 1067 x 1251

Personas and Scenarios

According to Caddick and Cable (2011), personas are fictional characters based on actual people and solid research. Personas tell a story of individual needs, pains, and goals. The creative personas reflect behavioral patterns observed during the research phase of the project, giving the team a guideline to follow during the redesign. Personas are used to validate the team's design decision. During the survey and interviews the team received a lot of great information that made the creation of personas relatively easy. The scenarios represented the goals for the three different categories of observed users the team identified. Scenarios give personas a contextual meaning, reflecting actual behavior. They showcase the user's interactions and goals.

Based on the collected user data, the team created the following personas and scenarios. They represent the three main types of Apache Junction Visitor website users—seasonal visitors, young professionals on a family vacation/trip, and an avid outdoorsman in pursuit of a great experience and thrill. Persona 1 represents the young traveler who wants to explore new places. Persona 2 represents the seasonal visitor to Apache Junction. Persona 3 represents a family focused, budget conscious individual.



“ I have a collection of trinkets from all of my weekend trips. ”

Ron the Traveler

Outdoorsy, Adaptable, Diligent

Age: **23**

Location: **Phoenix, AZ**

Family: **2 sisters**

Status: **Single**

Job Title: **College Student**

Internet Expertise:



Goals:

- Collect a new trinket from a local Apache Junction **store**.
- Explore a local **museum** and **state park**.
- Find other **outdoor activities** to enjoy the desert scenery.

BIO:

Ron is college student that likes to use his extra weekend time to road trip with friends. Small Arizona towns allow him to travel back and forth to campus easily, while still enjoying great desert scenery. Ron's next trip is to Apache Junction. He wants to find outdoor activities to do that him and his friends can enjoy while there.

Scenario 1:

Ron decided to visit Apache Junction. He's heard about the great desert scenery. He goes to the Apache Junction Visitors site to find local shops selling fun trinkets that he can bring back as a souvenir. On the main Visitors page, he finds tax information about shopping locally, but no links to shops or malls. He clicks on Resource Directory, with no luck. He has to click the back button to return to the main page as the sidebar has changed. Things to Do doesn't include shopping, so he heads to Google.

Scenario 2:

Ron wants to find fun and quirky outdoor activities to do while at Apache Junction with his friends. He assumes that the website would highlight these type of activities. He logs onto the Visitors page and sees a lot of text that he doesn't want to read. After a minute of scanning on the main visitor page, he finds a Tourism Brochure, but the brochure is unuable, as there are no road names, directions, or descriptions of particular activities. He goes back to the main page and finds a Things to Do link. None of the links are descriptive of the activities mentioned and he gets frustrated. Ron clicks a few links to explore (video about things to do, Ghostfield Ghost Town and Lost Dutchman State Park), however, these links lead him to other sites with more links and no useable information. He resorts to Google where he sees that Apache Junction has ziplining. He returns to the website to find if the website even has ziplines available, with no luck.

Recommendation Report



“ I am not an internet pro, but I love to learn something new everyday. ”

Janet the Curious

Outgoing, Intellectual, Adventurous

Age: **69**

Location: **Minneapolis, MN**

Family: **2 kids, 2 grand kids**

Status: **Married**

Job Title: **Retired**

Internet Expertise:



Goals:

- Find **hiking trails** in the **Superstition Mountains**.
- Hike a **new trail each week** while visiting for the winter.
- Learn about the **history** of Apache Junction and the surrounding area.

BIO:

Janet and her husband love to stay active and check things off of their bucket lists. They spend a lot of time geocaching, helping them to stay physically fit and explore new areas. Lately, Janet has spent a lot of time hiking. She knows that Apache Junction has many trails among the Superstition Mountains, yet has never been there before.

Scenario 1:

Janet is looking on the Apache Junction Visitors web page to find hiking trails in the Superstition Mountains. She looks at the Parks and Recreation tab and has no luck with seeing anything related to hiking trails. She goes back to click the Things to Do tab, and sees the link for Lost Dutchman State Park. She knows there is hiking there, however continues looking on the page for a hiking link. One of the images rotating at the top of the Things to Do page says hiking, so she clicks that picture. She's taken to the Forest Service website and finds a hiking tab. Clicking leads Janet to a list of trails in the Superstition Mountains. She notes some trails, to find coordinates in her GPS, and then closes the browser window.

Scenario 2:

Janet is seeking information on the museum about the Superstition Mountains history and she heard there were some movie props from westerns that were filmed in the 1960's. There was even a film with Elvis. She goes to the Things to Do tab and finds the link to the Superstition Mountain Museum – the link does not work which makes her frustrated. Janet's next attempt is to watch the video on things to do in Apache Junction, which tells her some history about Apache Junction. It also tells her about the movie set "Apacheland". Here, she finds the link to the Superstition Mountain Museum. She clicks for more information and decides to visit.

Recommendation Report

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt, has her arms raised in a celebratory gesture against a bright yellow background.

“ I love turning every moment into a meaningful memory. ”

Molly the Planner

Friendly, Economical, Energetic

Age: **41**

Location: **Mission Viejo, CA**

Family: **2 kids**

Status: **Married**

Job Title: **Art Teacher**

Internet Expertise:



Goals:

- Find activities for the **whole family**, including for her **autistic daughter** (**animals** recommended).
- Have fun while staying within **budget**.

BIO:

Molly and her kids like to visit new places, as well as stay in touch with family. Molly's work schedule allows her to take frequent trips, but her teacher salary prohibits her from lavish excursions. Her parents just retired and moved to Apache Junction, Arizona to stretch their retirement funds. Molly goes to the Apache Junction Visitor site expecting to find activities suitable for the whole family, including her daughter with mild autism. Interaction with animals is highly recommended in cases of autistic bouts.

Scenario 1:

Molly is visiting her parents. They tell her about a park with trails that can accommodate the entire family. She visits the Apache Junction Visitors site with hopes of finding maps of trails. As a teacher, organization is vital for performance. She clicks Things to Do and finds a lot of hyperlinks that all blend in. Confused, she clicks on the link to the Lost Dutchman State Park, and is redirected to an external website that opens in the same window. This frustrates her, but she continues on. There is another Things to Do link with a drop-down containing undescriptive items. She clicks Things to Do. Unfortunately, it displays only the names of the trails and some information—no maps. She moves to Google. Her patience is running dangerously low.

Scenario 2:

After a great hike, Molly decides to find a dinner venue. She wants something that showcases the local cuisine. She makes a second attempt to use the Apache Junction website, this time going directly to the search option. Scrolling through the results, Molly finds a recent folder dated 10/13/2016. Inside, to her dismay, there names of restaurants without indication of cuisine. There are no links to restaurant websites. Google, it is! One last look at the crumbs left her speechless—Home > Government > Departments Economic & Business Development > Residents - Shopping in Apache Junction > Dining Options. Who would have thought it will be so difficult to find a place to eat?

Recommendations

Data collected through competitor evaluations, user testing, user interviews, card sorting, and user surveys have exposed areas that could be improved within the Apache Junction Visitors website. It is recommended that the Apache Junction website rework three aspects of this Visitors section to improve the functionality of the site for potential visitors—content, architecture, and design.

Content

User research uncovered several improvement opportunities related to the website content. The team recommends the following information to be removed from the visitors section in order to provide a less confusing user experience for potential visitors.

- Jobs/Volunteer
- Adopt a Pet
- Pinal County Information

A comparison revealed gaps in the Apache Junction Visitors content. The following lists the information that should be added to the Apache Junction Visitors page to meet the needs of users.

- Accommodations
- Popular restaurants
- Maps of the city
- Maps of biking trails
- Maps of hiking trails
- Events calendar
- History of the town

Users found the content on the site to be hard to locate. It is suggested that event descriptions are:

1. Easier to find
2. Made more concise
3. More relevant to potential visitors, with the locations and pricing available

The main visitors page should highlight content that users may be particularly interested in. User research showed that the Lost Dutchman State Park and the Superstition Mountains are two important elements within Apache Junction and should be emphasized.

Architecture

The open card sorting activity helped to identify what the users of the site expect not only from content organization, but also from phrasing and verbiage. Based on the results, it is recommended that the site's architecture be simplified to four-six major navigation items, some organized further with a secondary navigation.

Users found the changing side navigation hard to follow, and the breadcrumb trail at the top of the interior pages inaccurate. Therefore, the side navigation should be completely static. The breadcrumb trail should either be removed altogether, or be made more accurate.

Design

The colors on the site work very well. Users found the maroon, blue, and brown color scheme to be representative of the southwest. However, the design and placement of content on the site should be rethought, as to make it more findable, readable, and useable for potential visitors. The areas for design improvement include:

- Use of impactful images
- More descriptive links
- Use of accordion menus
- Use of click rather than hover

Although users loved the images on the site, they did not always find them accurately relatable to page content. The images could be made more impactful if placed beside the events they represent. Use of a scenic hero image on the main Visitors page is a chance to portray the beautiful views of Apache Junction, and entice users to further explore the site.

Users found the links within the site not descriptive of destination. Links should be reworded to be more representative. Links leading to external sites or PDF's should include a universal website launch icon. This site should then open within a new tab in the user's browser.

The sidebar navigation within the Visitors section should stay static. Any additional submenu items should be displayed via an accordion menu. Accordion menus allow users to expand areas that they want to further explore, and collapse areas that they do not. This menu design stays contained on the right-hand side—the current sidebar expansions appear overtop of the page body.

Currently, there is a use of hover on the main site navigation, as well as any additional sidebar navigation. This was found to not be user friendly. This should be changed to click expansion—clicking on a main navigation item reveals additional submenu items.

Conclusion

According to the user research the team conducted, the user's needs have not been adequately addressed at present. Redesigning the site to include several new information categories is a priority for the user. The information architecture could benefit with better categorization and organization of the content. The visual appeal is currently described as flat, and can be improved by adding impactful images at the right place to support the text. Implementing the recommendations included in the report will increase the value of the website, increase the functionality and desirability, and potentially increase the number of visitors to the City of Apache Junction.

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GROUP 5 PROJECT REPORT

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TWC 544 USER EXPERIENCE

SEPTEMBER 22, 2017



Postively AJ

More than a gateway

Whether it's the Canyon Lake, the OK Corral Stables, the Goldfield Ghost Town or the Hitching Post Pizza Pub, Apache Junction (AJ) has all the fixings of a first class travel destination. Our hope is that this report about user research and our recommendations for the AJ website's 'Visitors' page will help you to achieve your goal of making Apache Junction a destination and not just a gateway to the East Valley.

In this report, you will find the results of our user research study and analysis of the visitor's page on the AJ website. We used a variety of research methods in an effort to gather the relevant facts that allowed us to make recommendations for improvements to the AJ 'Visitors' page (<https://www.ajcity.net/31/Visitor>), and by extension to the rest of the AJ website.

User Research and Analysis

The methods we used to research how users (in our case, potential visitors) perceive and interact with the site included the following: interviews, surveys, usability testing, comparative analysis, content audit, and card sorting. These methods helped us to test the effectiveness of the current 'Visitors' web page. Our analysis of the results allowed us to reveal the areas where improvements are necessary.

INTERVIEWS & SURVEYS

We conducted interviews and surveys to determine the expectations of potential visitors who would use the AJ website. These methods helped us to discover the needs and preferences of those coming to the site for information. We discovered that

Users (i.e., potential visitors) want

- A city's website to have sufficient (extensive but concise) information
- The content to be visually stimulating, with short, useful descriptions
- Easy, obvious navigation (otherwise, they used the search feature)

Users do not want

- Videos and downloadable brochures/PDFs (those ranked at the bottom in user preferences)
- Broken links: links to an error page (when users encountered broken links, they left the page and did not return)

USABILITY TESTING

The usability testing allowed us to determine how well AJ's current page helps visitors find the content they need. The activity also enabled us to identify areas where the site needs improvement. We tested the 'Visitors' webpage by giving potential visitors a task. For example, the research participants were given the following scenarios:

- You want to visit Apache Junction. You are looking for a place to stay and activities to do while there.
- You want to visit Apache Junction with your family. You are looking for a place to stay and activities for your young kids aged 12 and 8.

A number of the research participants expressed the feeling that the site navigation was confusing. First, it took them too much effort to locate some of the

things they were looking for. Second, the pages did not contain or directly display the content they expected and needed.

Some users gave up on using the navigation tree and performed a site search instead. This search led to mixed results. It appears that the search function does not just provide results of the content on the web pages; there is a documentation center on a server which is displayed in the search results. This led to irrelevant or outdated content occupying much of the page with the search results.

Another concern that the research participants expressed was that the AJ tended to send you away from the site. For example, there are a number of helpful links in the “Things to do” section. Unfortunately, they are links that take visitors away from the AJ site entirely. This behavior tends to lead users to abandon the site.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

We performed a comparative analysis with the websites of other AZ cities of similar size to Apache Junction. We used the cities of (1) Prescott, AZ (2) Marana, AZ and (3) Bullhead City, AZ. All of these cities have local attractions that would be of interest to visitors.

The Town of Marana’s website (<http://www.maranaaz.gov/>), for example, provided a significant contrast with its bold, contemporary presentation (see Figure 1). The website is designed to appeal to the visitor’s emotions. It is fresh,

visually stunning and active. The color and image rotation give the site life. Also, the ability to simply scroll down the site in order to see the main sections delivers a superior experience for the user who are not getting tied up in menu options and a navigation tree that is too long.

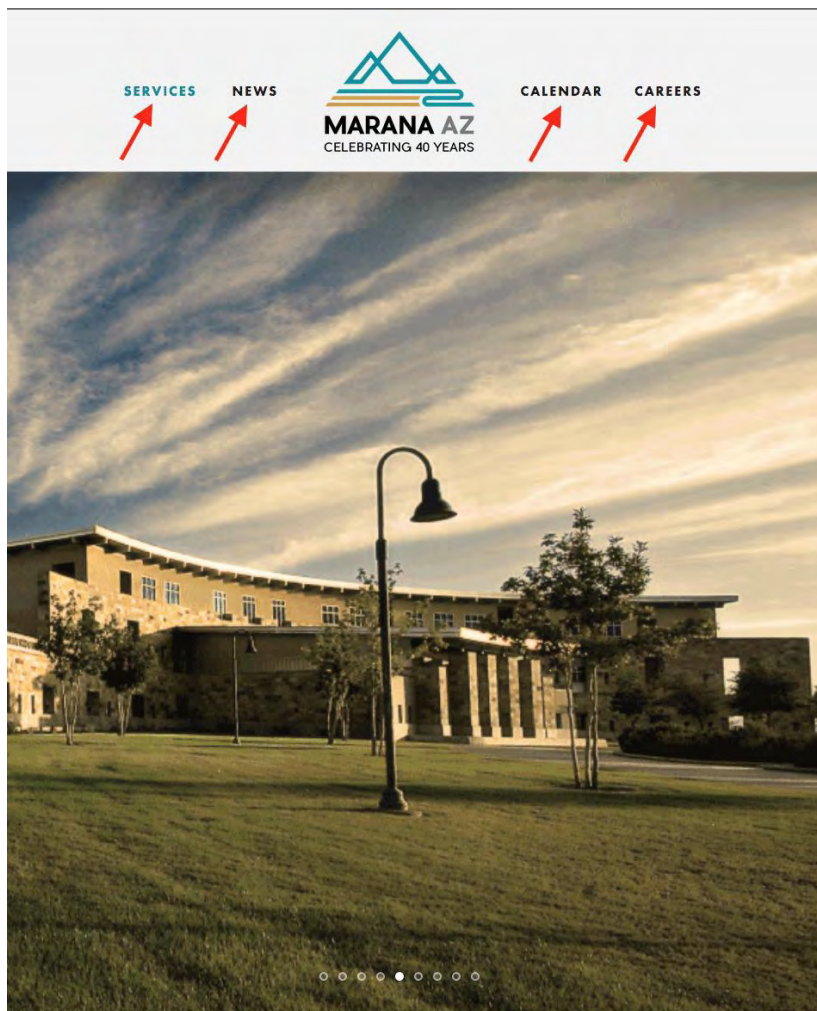


Figure 1: The Website of Marana, AZ

The red arrows in Figure 1 point to the simplicity of the site navigation. There are only four 1st-tier information objects displayed at the top of the site: 'SERVICES,'

'NEWS,' 'CALENDAR,' and 'CAREERS.' Visitors to the site can click on these objects, or simply scroll down to view the website's main sections. Dispensing with the traditional navigation sidebar provides the user with a fluid, easy experience without the frustration that comes from getting lost in the navigation tree. It gives the user the impression that Marana is a modern and exciting place to visit.

CONTENT AUDIT

A primary focus of the content audit was to catalogue all content intended for the potential visitors, to assess the quality of this content, and to determine if this content supports the typical tasks, goals, and scenarios for a typical potential city visitor (see the attached file with personas and scenarios). The content was evaluated against the qualitative criteria such as relevance, relatability, and findability.

Figure 2 shows the mapping for the content within the AJ Visitors webpage. Our analysis identified four categories that should be moved elsewhere in the AJ website because would not be high on the list for a potential visitor: (1) Apache Junction Chamber of Commerce, (2) Relocation Information, (3) Pinal County, Resource Directory, and (4) Senior Services. While the information in these categories might be beneficial and relevant to current residents, potential visitors might be discouraged from looking further into the site if this is the first thing they see.

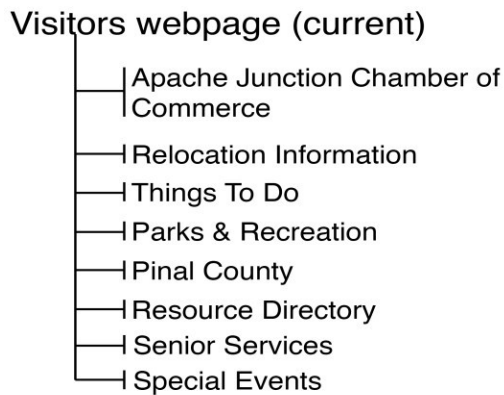


Figure 2: Current Navigation Map

The content audit also highlighted the fact that there were a number of dead links, meaning links to a webpage that no longer exists. As we saw in the survey, this is the type of situation that will cause a user to leave the site and not return. In addition, the audit made us aware that there is more information that should be included in those three categories that is currently missing from the site. This is covered in the next section, Card Sorting.

CARD SORTING

Card sorting proved to be a very powerful tool for website analysis. We employed the card sorting method to determine what categories of information (i.e., navigational tabs) would be intuitive for visitors to the AJ site and what type of content users would expect to find in each category. It helped us make suggestions on the basic navigation, specific links, and even any additional

content that users would expect to find. Six participants grouped a collection of content topics into logical categories. Figure 3 shows the categories that our research participants preferred.

LOGGING/HOTELS	DINING	HIKING	FAMILY ACTIVITIES	FITNESS	SHOPPING	SPECIAL EVENTS / CALENDAR
The Grand Hotel	Handlebar Pub and Grill	Lost Goldmine Trail	Salt River	Apache Junction Multi-Generation Center	Mother Lode Mercantile	Antique Tractor Show
Best Western Apache Junction Inn	Mining Camp Restaurant	Peralta Trailhead	Roosevelt Lake	Youth fitness classes	Stop and Shop Military Surplus	Arizona Renaissance Festival
Motel 6	Dutchman's Hideout	Silly Mountain Park	Canyon Lake	Girls on the run	Unnecessary Necessities	Lost Dutchman Days
Hampton Inn & Suites	Filly's Roadhouse	The Dutchman Trail	Apache Lake	Fit families	Swap Meet	Veteran's Day Parade
Apache Lake Marina 7 Resort	Cowboy's Up	Usery Mountain Regional Park	Tortilla Flat			Festival of the Superstitions
KOA Kampground	The Hitching Post	Cave trail	Boyce Thompson Arboretum Tonto National Forest Goldfield Ghost Town OK Corral Stables Apache Trail Jeep Tours The Dolly Steamboat Commemorative Air Force Museum Superstition Mountain Museums Military surplus and museum			

Figure 3: Card Sort Results That Show Intuitive Site Navigation (Navigation Tabs with Relevant Information under Each Tab)

Recommendations

Based on our research and analysis, we make four recommendations:

(1) Improve the visual impact

We recommend redesigning the AJ website to a more contemporary, visual design, similar to the design that was used for the Town of Marana. With a bolder, minimalistic use of color and imagery, visitors will be able to see all that Apache Junction has to offer. By simplifying the navigation and adding more information, users can easily be directed to the information they are looking for.

(2) Rename the visitor's page content categories

Organize the content on the 'Visitors' page into categories that target the needs of potential visitors. We recommend categories like the ones shown in Figure 4.

Visitors webpage (redesigned)

- Lodging/Hotels
- Dining
- Hiking
- Family Activities
- Fitness
- Shopping
- Special Events

Figure 4: Recommended Navigation Map



(3) Expand the content within the Apache Junction website

The pages within the Apache Junction website should ideally contain a broad selection of content that meets the content scenarios for typical potential visitors (see the attached file with personas and scenarios). Figure 3 contains suggestions for the content topics and categories based on what potential visitors are expecting to find on the AJ website.

If the user can find what they need on this site, it will encourage them to remain within its pages for a longer period of time. Therefore, the AJ site should have its own multi-media content rather than linking to external sites. This would translate into the user exploring more of the internal content before visiting another site, and, ultimately, another city.

We also recommend to have searchable content in the web pages and not bottled up in PDFs. This will help with Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

(4) Ensure that the content on the site is current and valid

Without a doubt, dead links will turn a user away from using your site. Therefore, rather than leaving this type of maintenance to the manual efforts of one user, there are programs that you can run on your site. For example, Xenu's Link Sleuth (<http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html>) is a free tool that is used by large corporations for this very purpose. Once a user loses trust in a site, they

likely will never return. You should endeavor to keep your site free from broken links.

Conclusion

Apache Junction is a unique city surrounded by beautiful, natural Sonoran Desert landscaping with access to a wide variety of Arizona's attractions. When your website showcases that beauty and focuses on the rich history of the area, we are confident that you will make AJ a premier Arizona vacation destination.

PRESENTATION SLIDES FROM FALL 2017 SHOWCASE

View the whole presentation at <https://vimeo.com/247838665>

Fall 2017 Partnership with Apache Junction


ASU Project Cities Web User Experience for AJ Visitors

Positively Apache Junction – TWC 544: User Experience

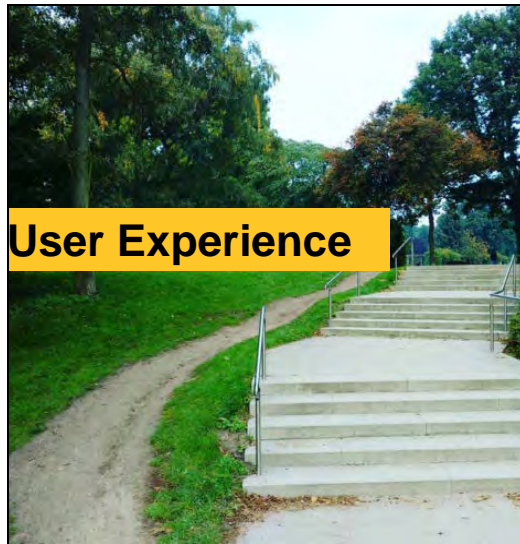
Dr. Tatiana Batova



- Online
- Multiple majors
- Multiple locations
- Graduate
- 7.5 weeks

A photograph of a modern building with a red roof, partially obscured by green trees and a field of yellow wildflowers in the foreground. A yellow text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

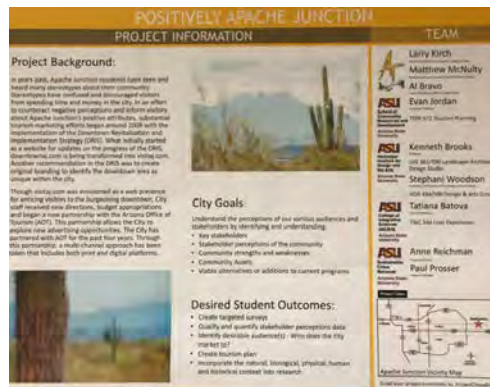
**TWC 544: User Experience
ASU-Polytechnic**

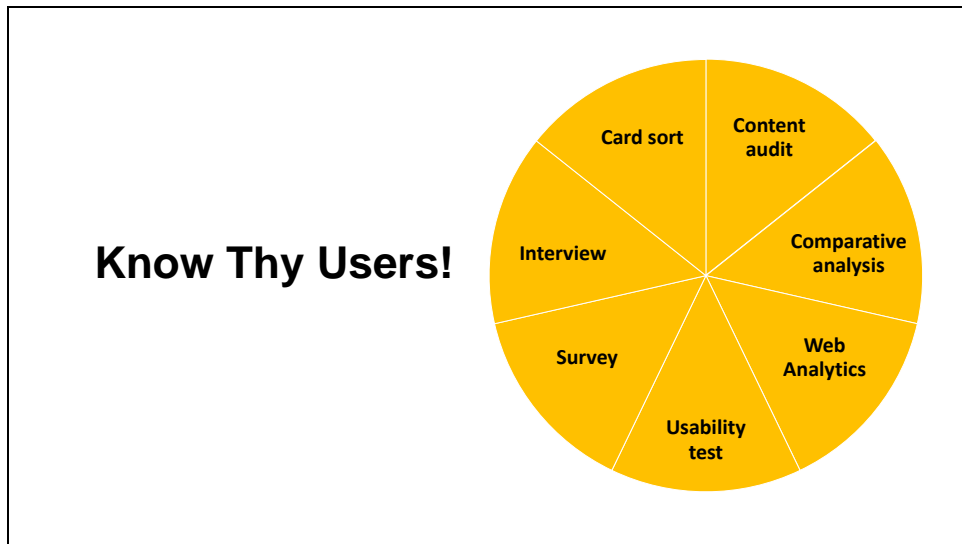
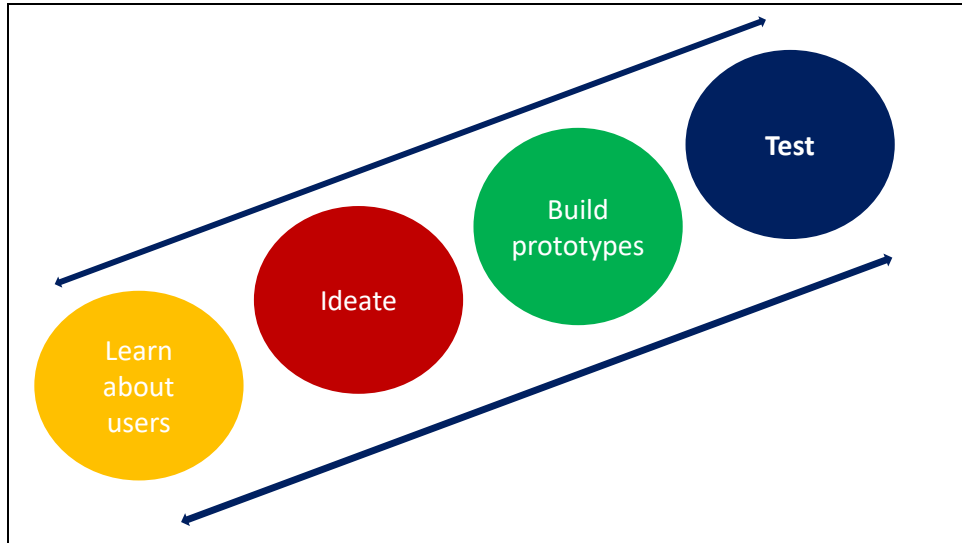


a person's perceptions and responses that result from the use or anticipated use of a product, system or service.

User Experience of <https://www.ajcity.net/>

- Inform potential visitors about positive attributes of AJ
- Encourage visitors to spend time and money in the city





Findings

- Good visual appeal
- Attractive video



Goodwill

Findings

- Not finding what I'm looking for
- Too much information
- It takes too long
- Where am I? How did I get here?
How do I go back?
- Getting redirected
- Having to use search function
- Google
- It's not right on my smartphone



Goodwill

Recommendations

- Simpler navigation categories for visitors
- Snippets of information on area attractions
- Working links
- Searchable calendar of events
- Sortable information about lodging & dining
- Only information relevant from visitors' point of view
- Mobile-friendly/responsive design
- Updated keyword search

Goodwill

Janet the Curious
Outgoing, Intellectual, Adventurous

Age: 69
Location: Minneapolis, MN
Family: 2 kids, 2 grand kids
Status: Married
Job Title: Retired

Internet Expertise:
Beginner

Goals:

- Find hiking trails in the Superstition Mountains.
- Take a new trail each week while visiting for the winter.
- Learn about the history of Apache Junction and the surrounding area.

BIO:
Janet and her husband love to stay active and check things off of their bucket lists. They spend a lot of time geocaching, helping them to stay physically fit and explore new areas. Lately, Janet has spent a lot of time hiking. She knows that Apache Junction has many trails among the Superstition Mountains, yet has never been there before.

Scenario 1:
Janet is looking for the Apache Junction Visitors website to find hiking trails in the Superstition Mountains. She looked at the Parks and Recreation tab and then ended up seeing anything related to hiking trails. She goes back to click the Things to Do tab, and sees the link for Lost Dutchman State Park. She knows there is hiking there, so Janet continues looking on the page for a hiking link. One of the images catches her eye, so she clicks that picture. She is taken to the Forest Service website and finds a hiking trail. Clicking words lead to a list of trails in the Superstition Mountains. She notes some trails, so she creates in her GPS, and then closes the browser window.

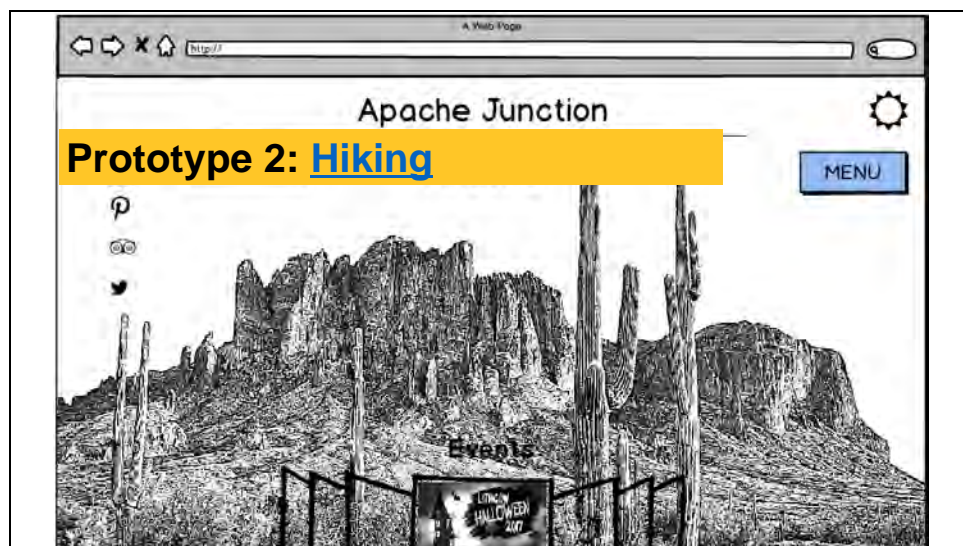
Scenario 2:
Janet is seeking information on the museum about the Superstition Mountains history and she heard there were some moving pieces from someone that was filmed in the 1960s. There was even a film with Gino. She goes to the Things to Do tab and finds the link to the Superstition Mountain Museum - the one she does not work which makes her frustrated. Janet's next attempt is to watch the video on trails to go in Apache Junction, which tells her some history about Apache Junction. It also refers her about the movie set "Apocalypse". Here, she finds the link to the Superstition Mountain Museum. She clicks for more information and decides to visit.

Personas

Visitor archetypes
Their goals and tasks

Scenarios

The stories of the interaction
with the website



Thank you!

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