The City Visitor Trail aligns with VisitEngland’s Strategic Framework Objective 4 – to facilitate greater engagement between the visitor and the experience. It also contributes to the VisitEngland Destination Management Action Plan, as it delivers an authentic and distinctive destination experience, with a clear focus on the needs of visitors and the environment, contributing a 3.2% growth, year-on-year, to the City’s attractions (growth measured in 2013 during soft launch phase).

The problem:
Relative to other London Boroughs, the City is small, easy to walk around and has a greater density of things to see and do; this includes a significant portfolio of heritage attractions. Most visitors to London will want to visit an attraction within the City; the Tower of London, Tower Bridge and St Paul’s are “must-sees.” Yet visitors do not always know they are in the City and so fail to make the connection that “City” attractions are in close proximity to one another. Many take the tube or bus from St Paul’s to the Tower of London, while some leave the City altogether to go to another part of London, before returning to visit an attraction that was close to their original departure point.

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The solution:
The City of London Corporation (CoL) sought to address these issues through its Visitor Development Team and the creation of a City Visitor Trail. By providing clear mapping, routes and itineraries that appeal to the visitor, the Trail helps to:

- Enhance the visitor experience by “interpreting” the City and its attractions
- Drive footfall to and between City attractions and so increase revenues and visitor dwell time
- Promote walking as the easiest, most efficient and most enjoyable means of seeing the City
- Aid navigation by using the same base mapping in print as on-street signage
- Drive visitors to the City’s Principal Shopping Centres (PSCs), as identified in the CoL’s Local Plan, by featuring retail options in the itineraries offered by the Trail
- Deliver the City as a visitor package that makes it easier for CoL’s partners (e.g. VisitEngland and London & Partners) and its stakeholders (attractions and hotels etc.) to promote on its behalf
Approach

The City Visitor Trail was:

• Soft launched in April 2013, with a bells and whistles launch in March 2014, including an above-the-line marketing campaign scheduled for August 2014
• Adapted and developed to align with user feedback for the March launch, with the product finessed to meet visitor needs and objectives of the CoL across relevant departments

The Trail comprises:

• A paper map (A2) describing the best walking routes between the City's top attractions, with suggested stops along the way for lunch, a spot of retail therapy and the odd insider tip about a feature of a building or the streetscape itself
• Six themed routes: 'City Highlights'; Law and literature; London stories, London people; Culture vultures, Market mile; and Skyscrapers and sculpture’ – all of which are quicker to follow than any public transport option and the map was cleverly gridded to tell the user exactly how long a walk will take
• An audio app (for iPhone or Android) through which visitors can hear stories about what they are seeing from the mouths of those that know the attractions best, be that a Beefeater at the Tower of London, or a choirboy at one of the City’s churches
• A children’s map with stickers and plenty of activities to engage families (2014 launch only)

In addition:

• If a visitor starts the Trail at the City Information Centre (as advised), they can purchase tickets for all the attractions they will see that day, saving more time
• The Trail was fully audited by the CoL access team and remains fully accessible. The accessible information along with other elements is available for download from the City’s website

In 2014, features on the new app included:

• GPS enablement
• Google mapping
• A toilet finder function
• Social media sharing facilities (soliciting reviews on Trip Advisor, Facebook and foursquare check-ins)
• A feedback mechanism
• Audio content from an array of characters including a pearly queen and a retired Fleet Street journalist, covering sites at Leadenhall Market, St Bride’s Church, St Dunstan in the East (garden), Petticoat Lane Market, Guildhall Great Hall, St Mary le Bow Church and Sculpture in the City, as well as the big attractions like St Paul’s and Tower Bridge

Core funding for the City Visitor Trail was provided by:

• Tower Bridge
• The Monument
• Guildhall Art Gallery

Sponsorship for both phase one and phase two elements was received from:

• The Diocese of London

Other funding includes:

• Transport for London (TfL) through their Local Implementation Plan funding

The Trail was delivered in partnership with:

• Open City (children’s map)
• London Borough Tower Hamlets (Market mile)
• London & Partners (overseas promotion)

Management:

Relevant sponsors, partners and participating departments (e.g. the attractions) were invited to sit on a steering group and through that actions were agreed and delivered.

Non-availability of representatives was sometimes an issue, but the sending of deputies and sharing of designs and outputs for approval via email mitigated any negative impacts. Agreement of a clear set of guiding objectives in the early stages of the group was key and avoided clashes later down the line when a wide variety of views needed to be considered.

“Soft launched in April 2013, with a bells and whistles launch in March 2014, including an above-the-line marketing campaign scheduled for August 2014.”
Results

At the time of writing, only the pilot phase could be analysed as phase two was pending launch in March 2014.

To date:

- **130k** maps have been distributed
- **1,075** apps (Apple = 701, Android = 374) were downloaded by visitors from across the world, a disappointing figure, but largely related to no marketing/PR in phase one (2013/14) and the inability to promote an app within the App Store
- **3.2%** An audience figure of 3.2% was reported by those attractions that could measure visitor numbers generated via the Trail
- **201,600** visits Translating this across all featured attractions, the figure equates to 201,600 visits, or 22% of City visitor growth for the year

This project was a real first for the City, with multiple stakeholders working together to achieve greater footfall and revenues for the tourism sector, while promoting sustainable methods of transport and meeting multiple objectives in the City’s Local Plan and other strategies.

The key factor for success was that revenues at participating attractions were increased at a level to warrant their investment or, where no admission was charged, footfall increased as a direct result of the Trail to targets agreed with each attraction. All targets were met or surpassed.

In terms of impact on economy, employment and quality of life, the growth figures opposite address the first two; quality of life impacts are anecdotal, but include the promotion of walking as a means of well-being and a sustainable alternative to public and private transport, as well as the convenience of new “extras” in the app such as a nearest toilet finder. The new children's map (delivered in partnership with Open City), will also help to ensure that families and younger audiences feel welcome in the City.

“The key factor for success was that revenues at participating attractions were increased at a level to warrant their investment.”
Challenges and Lessons Learnt

Phase one of the Trail was very important; from this the CoL:

• Learnt about app marketing and the need for dedicated PR – a website can improve promotion through SEO and there is no equivalent to help ensure an app is headlined in the App Store

• Refined routes aligned to visitor feedback and noted any access issues

• Cultivated interest in the Trail from retail and other businesses who were positive about future advertising opportunities within the app – a function that was built-in with the new re-purposed phase two edition

• Understood needs by “putting something on the table” and then refining it aligned with the wishes of all stakeholders – sponsors, publics, participating attractions etc

The main obstacles to overcome through the launch of the Trail were identifying a vehicle that could engage visitors; enhance their visit; fairly represent the destination and the stakeholders within it; would be self-financing, through sponsors whose revenues or footfall justify investment; and which delivered on objectives across a number of the City of London Corporation services.

Top Tips

1. For a complex, multi-stakeholder project such as this, run a pilot phase to test take-up and solicit feedback that will enable you to refine your product

2. An app needs to be functional, simple and provide something of value for the user that cannot be given to them by other means; be sure this is the best media for your project and note that promotion can only be achieved by rigorous PR and press endorsement of your product

3. While the views of all stakeholders should be considered, do not try to please everyone and in so doing, meet the needs of none. Ensure you have an agreed set of objectives from the outset and refer back to these when difficult decisions must be made

For more information

Visit: www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/cvt
Watch: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWLLGF5BTjU
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