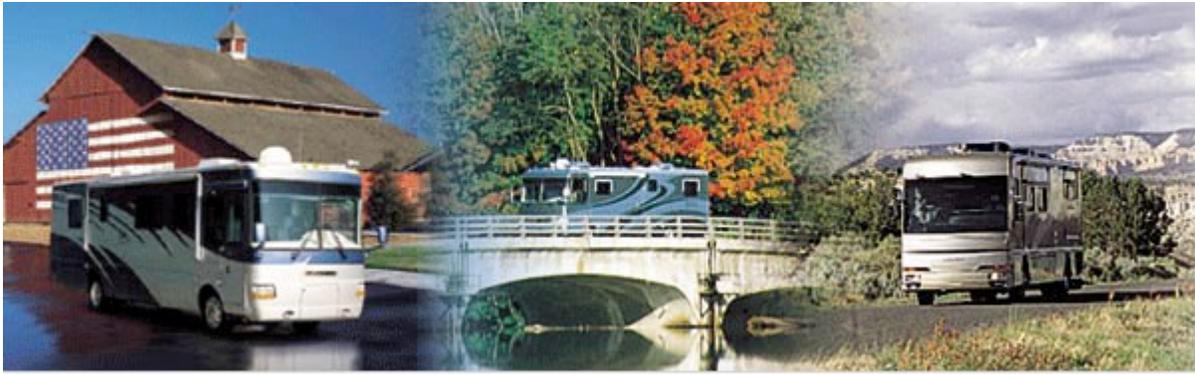


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Marketing News for RV Parks,  
Campgrounds & Services from  
the TRAILER LIFE DIRECTORY

# eHighway

## In This Issue:

This month we feature another article by the RVgeeks, this time about using Google maps on your park's Web site. Next, some encouraging news from RVIA about the predicted increase in RV shipments for 2010 and 2100 as the economy recovers from the recession. And finally, Go RVing's continuing ad campaign.

Enjoy this month's installment of Trailer Life Directory's eHighway!

## Harness the Magic of Google Maps on Your Web Site to Ensure a Pleasant Trip for Your Guests

As full-time RVers, we spend a fair amount of time doing trip planning. Visualizing destinations, routing and camping choices is part of the fun of being on the road. Just like most RVers we know, the Internet has become the tool of choice for discovering new places to go, what to see when we get there, and navigating along the way.

Once we've chosen a city or area to visit, the next decision usually involves our choice of an RV park or campground. Of course we keep a copy of the *Trailer Life Campground Directory* on board as a great reference tool, but the vast information available online adds a whole new world of detail to that great starting point.

Since we like to know as much as possible about the places where we're considering staying, we are far more likely to choose a park that has an informative Web site. Without good photos and details, we never know what we'll find when we arrive. Of course, without good directions, we might not find the park at all!

Frankly, the majority of RV park websites we see have driving directions and/or maps that do a less-than-optimal job of making sure that customers can easily find the park. They range from simple text directions to static images of maps that fail to show enough detail or a large-enough area.

August 2009

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When choosing a campground, we have actually eliminated RV parks from consideration simply as a result of not being able to figure out exactly where they're located, or what the access is like. A large 5th wheel, or an RV towing a car, can easily top 50 to 60 feet in length... and can't back up without considerable difficulty, or disconnecting the toad.

After handling such a large vehicle all these years, we know that non-RVers might not recognize the limitations and restrictions involved when selecting a route. Having to call a campground to ask directions, then depending on the guidance of whoever answers the phone, is not our preferred method of navigation. We know that, ultimately, we are responsible for our own driving safety.

Many parks have the right idea on their Web sites — integrating an online map, such as those offered by MapQuest, Yahoo, Microsoft and Google. Despite this wise choice, there is more to it than simply activating a map with your park's address as the destination point.

First, not all maps are created equal. Without disparaging any particular map provider, suffice it to say that some maps are inaccurate, difficult to read, have non-intuitive controls, or simply don't work as well as others.



As avid users of this technology, both as RVers and Web site designers, we saw early on that one company has figured things out better than their competition — Google. We're not saying that the others don't work... just that, as with so many things Google does, they have created a system and interface that works so well, it is simply, in our opinion, the best out there.

Besides providing search information about your business on Google Local Maps (a topic worthy of its own article), Google's mapping will ensure that your customers can easily find you. They'll show up at your door relaxed and happy about the stress-free experience they had navigating to your park.

There are several terrific elements to a Google Map, starting with the map itself. Not only can your Webmaster embed a customized map neatly within your website, but the exact default zoom level can be pre-set. This allows your park to be shown in a recognizable area and context by including nearby cities, national parks, or bodies of water in the view.

Another wonderful feature is Google Interactive Driving Directions. Simply entering any address into the search box will provide detailed driving directions to your park from any location. This includes exact mileage (or kilometers if desired), estimated driving time, turn-by-turn directions, and a graphical depiction of the route right on the map.

If an RVer would rather avoid certain roads (maybe they prefer exploring back roads vs. interstate highways, for example), they can utilize a feature commonly known as "Snap Routing," which allows them to simply drag any portion of the route from one road onto another. The turn-by-turn directions, mileage and estimated time will immediately update to reflect the change. It's a truly fantastic trip-planning tool.

Is there a specific route that campers should follow when approaching your park? For example, do you want to be sure your map doesn't route them under a low overpass, or down a small local street with a low weight limit? No problem with Google Maps. Your webmaster can add one or more waypoints, or "pushpins," along the route that force the Interactive Driving feature to provide your guests with correct and exact routing, utilizing your personal knowledge of the local area.

The intuitive Google Map controls allow users to easily zoom in and out to any desired level, and click and drag to pan to the desired viewing area. Choosing the "Satellite" view allows your customers to view your park and surrounding area on a detailed, zoom-able satellite photo. What better way for them to confidently scope out their route (and your park) in advance?

Actually, there is a better way — Street View, which is a feature within Google Maps. After entering a starting point in the Driving Directions box, the resulting map will include this remarkable feature, where available. The turn-by-turn directions actually include 360-degree photographs of every intersection along the route.

Simply by clicking the little camera icons next to the driving instructions, your customers can actually see every detail of their trip. They'll know, for example, that the correct turn onto your street is a shallow left at a traffic light with a Shell station on the right. They can even click along the route to see a complete street-level 360-degree view of every available street photo.

Not every street in the country has been photographed yet, so Street View is not available everywhere. But Google has been rolling out this amazing feature at a rapid rate, and even some of the most remote parts of the country have already had at least the main roads added to the database.

If your park is on a road that's been photographed for Street View, your customers will already know exactly what your entrance sign looks like too, so they'll really be all ready for your driveway as they approach. Check it out yourself to see yet another detail your customers can learn about your park when deciding where to stay.

The amount of detail these resources provide will assure the most relaxed, well-prepared trip for even the most cautious RVer. Plus, the maps and directions are fully printable, so the laptop won't need to be kept "idling" on the dashboard during the trip. What a great service for Google (and you) to provide for your customers.

One problem with using online mapping to locate an RV park lies in the very nature of the campground business — they are often located in remote, poorly mapped areas. Even the finest online mapping system cannot accurately identify every single address.

This can be a major problem, unless the map allows you to manually set your location, thereby guaranteeing its accuracy. Being off by even a short distance can be very frustrating to RVers, who want to make the turn into your entrance drive on the first shot, without risking a trip around the block, or having to make a U-turn, or disconnecting their tow car.

Regardless of the accuracy of your street address, Google has once again provided tools to solve the problem. Your Webmaster can utilize GPS coordinates to precisely place your map location with 100% accuracy, right at your front entrance. Even the best portable GPS units can't find an incorrectly plotted street address, without your guests knowing the correct GPS coordinates to input. Of course your customers won't know that your street address is plotted wrong... until you get that agitated call after they've driven ten miles out of the way, and still can't find you. That's probably not the best way to ensure they arrive relaxed and happy at your park.

As we said, we aren't disparaging competing mapping companies. We have simply found that both as RVers, and as website designers, Google has simply built one terrific mousetrap. We believe in their maps so much, that we've integrated Google Maps and Interactive Driving Directions exclusively into every RV park website we've ever designed.

Our customers (and more importantly their customers) have been thrilled with the results.

*Full-time RVers Peter & John design beautiful and effective custom websites for RV parks and campgrounds. They specialize in effectively increasing your business through thorough Search Engine Optimization, compelling imagery and logical, intuitive website navigation and layout. Learn more at [www.rvgeeks.net](http://www.rvgeeks.net).*

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## RV Shipments to Begin Recovery in 2010



Jekyll Island Campground, Georgia.  
Photo Courtesy of Lou Henry

The RV industry's shipments are projected to total approximately 169,500 units in 2010 — a 24 percent increase from the 136,500 predicted for 2009 — according to a new forecast by RV industry analyst Dr. Richard Curtin, released at Recreation Vehicle Industry Association's (RVIA) Annual Membership Meeting on June 9.

Seasonally adjusted shipments reached their low point in the first quarter of 2009, and gains are expected over the next two years as the negative financial factors that caused the steep drop in RV sales will slowly give way to improved conditions in the market.

Dr. Richard Curtin, director of consumer surveys at the University of Michigan, who produces the closely watched monthly Index of Consumer Sentiment, briefed RVIA members on his analysis of the industry's future at RVIA's annual Committee Week, held June 8–11 in Washington, DC. "The persistent appeal of the RV lifestyle as well as the good economic value provided by this form of recreation will energize future growth in the RV market, once again driving the RV market to higher levels," said Curtin.

Dr. Curtin said there is considerable uncertainty about the future course of the economy as well as future RV sales. This uncertainty means that RV shipments in 2010 could actually be as much as 15 percent more or less than his forecast. "This is the longest and deepest U.S. recession of the past half century," said Dr. Curtin. "However, while fluctuations in sales are expected, there has been no change in the strong preferences expressed by consumers for the RV lifestyle."

Consumer confidence has surged in recent months because of optimism about the Obama administration's economic stimulus efforts and financial reforms, which RVIA worked hard to be sure included the RV industry. While these programs will aid consumers, Curtin says the pace of gains in RV sales will be more gradual than in the initial phase of past recoveries because of lingering effects from the credit crisis, slow economic growth, and higher levels of unemployment. In addition, the priorities of many

consumers have shifted toward debt repayment, and restoration of savings and retirement accounts.

Dr. Curtin emphasized that economic adversity has caused consumers to postpone the purchase of an RV but not to forsake their commitment to the RV lifestyle. "The RV industry is in the business of helping families form lasting bonds and having a great time getting outdoors," said Curtin. "Those are core American values that will endure and create a lasting demand for RVs."

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## Go RVing Coalition Says Yes to New TV Ads

The Go RVing Coalition has approved the creation of new television ads to begin airing in early 2010 to keep RV travel prominently in the minds of consumers as the economy rebounds. The unanimous motion was passed at the Coalition's June 8 meeting during RVIA's Committee Week in Washington, DC, giving The Richards Group of Dallas, Texas, the go-ahead to begin concepting 2–3 new, low-cost spots with timely messaging about the value of RV ownership and travel.

Utilizing cost-effective, new production techniques, Go RVing will maximize the value of its unused creative materials. The ads are expected to be a combination of existing footage and still photographs in the Go RVing archives animated with special effects. To highlight some of the industry's newer, greener vehicles, a small-scale supplemental production shoot may be held in the Elkhart area prior to the ads' creation.

"This economical approach to production would give Go RVing an opportunity to highlight a strategic 'affordability/value' message for 2010–2011 and maximize funding available for ad buys," said RVIA Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer Gary LaBella. "And perhaps most importantly, the quality of the creative and the overall look and feel of the campaign would be consistent with the brand and with the updated print ads that began running this year."

The new television spots will be produced in the fall of 2009 and will be ready for debut at the opening Outlook breakfast at the National RV Trade Show in Louisville.

*Editor's note: Dates are December 1, 2 and 3; supplier booth space is already sold out.*

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The logo for eHighway, featuring a stylized lowercase 'e' in a red circle followed by the word 'Highway' in a serif font.

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