



case study

PORTS Program Expands, Enhances Student Access to California State Parks with Zoom

California State Parks is the largest state park system in the U.S., with nearly 300 parks offering a wealth of natural and cultural resources to residents within the state and beyond. But access to these parks can be limited for many people, including students. California State Parks began an initiative more than 15 years ago dedicated to providing video access to its resources and bringing the experience to the classroom. The distance learning program, called Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students (PORTS), uses interactive video conferencing to offer virtual field trips and assist K-12 educators in teaching students about California's state parks.

The best part: The PORTS program is committed to providing these virtual learning opportunities at no cost to schools and educators. Doing so means PORTS must leverage reliable, affordable tools to create engaging, repeatable, and scalable experiences.

Challenge

Brad Krey is the program manager for California State Parks and recognizes just how valuable classroom time is. He says the PORTS program is a way to expand traditional classroom walls without having to coordinate school schedules, pay for buses and transportation, and obtain the required parental consent.

"While we'd certainly love for every student to visit a California state park as part of their education experience, the reality is that with over 6 million students enrolled in K-12 public schools in California alone, we don't have the capacity to accommodate, let alone educate, that many students in person, in our parks," Krey said. "We've seen a shift toward more collaborative learning as we move away from textbooks and as newer, savvier teachers use technology as part of their K-12 curriculums. And PORTS has embraced the opportunity to create modern, interactive learning experiences for students through video."

Krey described how the PORTS program used to be primarily a green screen operation, with a few of the parks employing chroma-key studios. One challenge PORTS was initially looking to solve through these efforts was providing access to remote park resources. For



About PORTS

Organization: Parks Online
Resources for Teachers & Students
– California State Parks

Founded: 2003

Industry: Education and recreation

Mission: Enhance California State Park access for students and schools through interactive digital experiences

Solution: Zoom Meetings, Zoom Video Webinars

California State Parks

By the numbers

280 state parks

340 miles of coastline

970 miles of lake and river frontage

15,000 campsites

4,500 miles of trails

67 million visitors annually

"With Zoom, we do a lot less troubleshooting, and that's a big deal for teachers who have limited IT staff to help with connection issues."

- Jennifer Langer

PORTS program coordinator

instance, team members would broadcast live web camera video of elephant seals on Año Nuevo Island off the California coast or record footage in desolate locations in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, where it's too hot to be outside all day for live programs. They also would record unique interviews with experts, curate images, and mix it all into the chroma-key to run a program with students.

"Because everything has gone mobile, it changed our approach. We realized program delivery could be simplified and less resource-intensive," Krey said. "We wanted to expand on our original concept to create engaging digital content featuring real-time access to more of our park resources."

Solution

Krey and his team rely heavily on Zoom to expand access and enhance the relationships students can have with the California State Parks system and its expert staff.

"We believe video provides access to state parks," Krey said. "We're always trying to push communications and outreach in education, and we use the best tools available to create engaging digital access. In the last decade or so, we've been using video conferencing out in the field and use Zoom on every device — iPads, Surface Pro tablets, iPhones, and Androids."

With Zoom, PORTS can provide live learning experiences with on-site park interpreters, prepare concise video messages to share with students before and after a field trip to a park, and offer unique educational opportunities, including interactive experiences with divers navigating underwater cultural resources like sunken vessels in Lake Tahoe or one of California's Marine Protected Areas.

The PORTS program also has leveraged Zoom for a social media campaign in collaboration with the California Coastal Commission highlighting sea-level rise. California State Parks uses the campaign to showcase naturally occurring, extreme high tides to capture the effects rising sea levels will have on coastal parks and communities.

"We use the webinar feature to create broadcasts from multiple state parks along California's coast and push it out onto social media as a means to expand our outreach and our digital footprint," Krey said.



Result

The PORTS program uses Zoom's unified communications platform to ensure students are able to interact with park professionals and access California state parks in a meaningful — and totally free — way. In 2019 alone, the PORTS team will put on 2,000 individual presentations from 15 state parks for 75,000 students, about 65% of them in California.

"That's a 25% increase from the year before," Krey said. "We just couldn't do what we do without partnerships like Zoom."

PORTS Program Coordinator Jennifer Langer works directly with school districts, teachers, and IT administrators to ensure success on the classroom end and provide best-practices to engage students. She describes how easy-to-use technology like Zoom has removed many barriers to adoption in the classroom.

"The teachers are already familiar with the Zoom platform and are very receptive to it, and they're thrilled with how easy it is to connect," she said. "With Zoom, we do a lot less troubleshooting, and that's a big deal for teachers who have limited IT staff to help with connection issues."

Krey says the PORTS program will continue to provide the most realistic, engaging ways to bring content from a California state park into the classroom.

"We're doing some pretty far-out stuff right now, like curated VR content delivery through Google Expeditions," he said. "And we're looking for Zoom be a possible proxy to feed live VR experiences into a few dozen headsets into a classroom, bringing the most immersive opportunity possible for students who may never have a chance to visit a state park."

Zoom helps businesses and organizations bring their teams together in a frictionless cloud environment to get more done. Our easy, reliable, video- first unified communications platform for video, voice, content sharing, and chat runs across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems. Founded in 2011, Zoom is a publicly traded company on Nasdaq (ticker: ZM) and headquartered in San Jose, California.

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