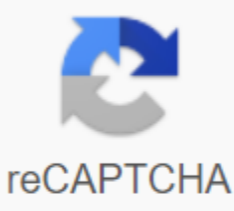




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Road trips are one of the ultimate summer activities, but it takes a lot of planning, especially if you aim to head across the country. While you can map exactly where you want to eat and stay and what to see, plans can change if you encounter unexpected weather. Instead of rolling with the punches, you can now try to make plan B if you get hit by bad weather by making use of a new The Weather Channel travel planner. In collaboration with Stamen Design, the road trip planner will show you the weather forecast for each stop you make along the drive to help you prepare or choose a new route altogether. Road trip planner can be especially useful if there are several different routes you can take from one city to another. So let's say you're driving from New York to San Francisco and you're trying to decide whether to go straight over or loop up or down a bit, the Stamen Design blog post reads. This will give you a feel for whether it will be rainy or sunny when you plan to be in the middle of Nebraska. To get started, simply enter your start and end cities. Click the plus bubble to add stops, and the app generates the expected weather in that general location. You can also go into detail with each city to note what day and how long you plan to leave to get the most accurate forecast. However, since weather forecasts are not made for more than a week at a time, things can be a bit limited in this regard. Developers have also added a Yelp API to help road trippers plan for restaurant suggestions in

the neighborhood, so all that's left for the traveler is their hotel stay. The Stamen Design blog post also shows a few prototype images of the map, including a forecast for the entire country to show full weather patterns. This could also be useful to determine the region you want to drive through during which time instead of entering random routes and hoping for the best. Although the map won't tell you the best recommended route, it can help you know exactly what to bring on the trip. Still, like most weather forecasts, you can't always expect the predictions to be completely correct. But for a free app that provides a useful insight, we don't see a reason not to use The Weather Channel travel planner. Unless, of course, you like the feeling of uncertainty or driving in a storm. After all, what is a road trip without some spontaneous adventures? Currently, the app is currently only available for travel in the United States. Try your own possible trip here. Editor's recommendations It was an otherwise ordinary day. Meteorologist Jim Cantore gave the weather forecast inside the Weather Channel studios. That was before the tornado hit. Suddenly, an electrical line fell just a few centimetres from Cantore's feet. A car fell from the sky above him. When the studio lost power and Fleed to the stairwell, the tornado hit with force, ripping walls and roof from the building. All that remained was a lone American flag waving the wreckage. No one was hurt, of course, because the scene never happened. It was generated as part of the Weather Channel's new Immersive Mixed Reality TELEVISION project. [Photo: Weather Channel] Although it only lasted for seven minutes, the segment was actually six years in its infancy. The project , which won an Innovation by Design award 2019 for best North American design, is part of an ongoing effort by the Weather Channel's design team to reinvent its presentation. Despite everything in the world that has changed since the middle of the century, weather broadcasts have remained largely the same since 1954, when British meteorologist George Cowling gave the first weather forecast in front of a map. Of course, graphics and technology have evolved enormously since then, and these advances have changed how we breathe: The map was digital, animated and filled with real-time Doppler radar readouts. But the Weather Channel hadn't fundamentally bucked the information design of early broadcast trends until a few years ago, [Photo: The Weather Channel] The weather broadcast has been represented pretty much the same way for decades now, admits Mike Chesterfield, director of weather presentation at the Weather Channel. It is very rich in information, but maps on actually trying to immerse the viewer in the weather forecast. The Weather Channel's viewership has been on a mostly upward trajectory: 2017 was the most-watched year since 2013. Meanwhile, extreme weather and storms have been on the upswing. Along with VP of design Michael Potts, Chesterfield began to consider what a more immersive Weather Channel would look like-a type of broadcast that could convey to the viewer the danger of extreme weather from floods to tornadoes, and preferably, without bringing the Weather Channel crew. There's a reason we put our talent out there [during storms] because we want the audience to feel like they're there and experience it with them, to understand the messages we're trying to give them, says Chesterfield. What if instead of taking meteorologists to the weather, they thought the weather could get to the meteorologists? That was the basic idea behind the earliest experiments of the channel's graphics and technical team. Although they didn't have the technical tools to produce full augmented reality yet, in 2015 they were hacking together a neat- if not entirely realistic-3D tornado inside the studio. It was the first aha moment for all of us, chesterfield says. We were able to put [meteorologist] Jim Cantore next to a tornado, and see how much it improved the story. The plan worked, but the team wanted more realism to really be able duplicate the on-location feeling. Then two years ago, they kickstarted the project by hiring The Future Group to build a more advanced augmented reality setup in the studio, complete with custom camera rigs and highly specialized back end. The platform they built runs graphics in Unreal Engine, graphics and physics simulator that powers some of the most popular video games in the world. Unlike the rendering technology behind, say, a Pixar film, which requires powerful computers to make images for months to create compelling frames, Unreal can run in real time, rendering tornadoes and other acclimatizing weather right in front of your eyes, which is exactly why it's used in budget animated TV shows already. [Photo: Weather Channel] With a technological pipeline in place, the team spent months developing the first tornado story, which premiered last year. The morning we launched, it was very nerve-wracking, remembers Chesterfield. A lot of people's hard work was in play there. You think you know how everything is going to go, but you don't know until you execute it. The broadcast went smoothly. Cars fell from the sky. Walls ripped from the studio. The immediate evidence we saw was through social channels, Chesterfield said. We got millions of views of the product. The comments in relation to the views were all very positive and encouraging as far as our ultimate goal is concerned, to improve our messages. (In fact, these segments have been viewed over 37 million times on social media, and represented nearly a billion media impressions in the past year, which is considered a coup for the television network.) [Photo: Weather Channel] While popular, the whole premise of a tornado tearing apart the studio was also a bit hokey, and perhaps overdramatic, compared to the devastation tornadoes cause in real life. As a meteorologist, I'm a scientist by nature. I take that very seriously, Chesterfield says. It's a balance we're trying to strike. We want to make these experiences as effective as possible, but at the same time we don't want to make people think that we [are going for] a reaction. In the 15 months since the Weather Channel debuted its immersive reality platform, it seems like the team is finding that editorial balance. Highlights include this look at the California wildfires, along with Hurricane Florence's storm surge - the latter of which involved flooding the study with deep, virtual water. Up to that date, we would put [the information] on a flat map and said you can expect 3 feet of storm surge, or 6 feet. But with wave effects, we could show how 3 feet and 6 feet look like [flooding] someone's neighborhood, says Chesterfield. Immediately we got a ton of answers on social. People shared it with family members on the way to the storm. It was the proof that we got people to react ahead of a storm. That is the aim of the network: to prevent tragedies instead of reporting on them. For Dorian, the Weather Channel featured a segment that began 48 hours before the storm made landfall, showing ways to prep your home for wind and rain. As for the future of this technology, the next goal is simply to do much more of it—by 2020, the channel wants 80% of its broadcasts to include this style of imagery. It will be a big mix of old school with the new school, Chesterfield says of the broadcast in 2020. They will work hand in hand in the future. Changing databases is not a step to be taken lightly, especially when the switch is to a relatively new form of database. The Weather Channel, however, found that it had to switch to a NoSQL MongoDB data store to quickly develop apps and add features to its range of internet-based weather information services. There was an awful lot of work to do in wrestling the tools to do what we wanted, said Luke Kolin, Vice President at The Weather Channel in charge of architecture. There was just too much boiler plate and wear work. For over a decade, the weather-oriented cable TV channel had relied on a traditional enterprise IT stack, including Java Enterprise Edition, Apache Tomcat Java servlet containers and MySQL databases. With this architecture, we had taken it as far as it could go, Kolin said. As part of an effort to update its IT infrastructure, The Weather Channel is now implementing the MongoDB NoSQL database to replace this stack. The performance of the company Java and MySQL stack was fine, but to develop with them had grown increasingly difficult in the fast competitive environment. MongoDB delivered the best combination of easy development and fast response times. As many other companies are learning, The Weather Channel is finding that its customer-facing technologies are among the most important to manage, as such technologies are the primary interface for many of its customers.IT analyst firm Forrester has estimated that in 2017, 31 percent of the company's technology spending will be for products and services that interact with the organization's customers , such as customer relationship management software, web content management, e-commerce storefronts, marketing automation, and customer analytics. Spending on these technologies will grow by 10 percent each year, Forrester predicted. As part of a unified baked-up of its media systems, The Weather Channel created an instance of MongoDB Enterprise on Amazon Web Services.Earlier this year, it switched its iPhone and Android apps over to the new database and plans to move the rest of its web operations to the service by the end of the month. Currently The Weather Channel's MongoDB responds to an average of 2 million requests every minute, while maintaining user information and copies of weather updates for tens of thousands of locations worldwide. Replacing a relational database with MongoDB, or any other NoSQL database, has been a controversial topic over the last few years. MongoDB is a NoSQL database, which means that it sacrifices some of the pre-settlement and joining capabilities offered by SQL-based relational databases, in favor of offering the ability to scale across multiple servers so that they can host very large data sets and respond to queries very quickly. MongoDB is known as a key value document store, which means it emphasizes fast data storage and retrieval. In some cases, this approach is not a good fit. MongoDB was a bad choice for running the ill-fated open source Diaspora social network, developer Sarah Mei has claimed. This project needed a relational data store where some data had to be permanently associated with other data. MongoDB was best suited for storing documents that don't need to be connected to each other in complex ways, Mei said. In The Weather Channel's case, however, MongoDB turned out to be a good fit. Our data access patterns were actually matching the NoSQL model quite well, Kolin said. Weather forecasts for specific locations make up the vast majority of the data that the channel sends out. These access patterns fit very well with key-value stores, Kolin said. The company does not have the vast network of interconnected data that the Diaspora had. More importantly, if the structure of data changes, then MongoDB's schema can be easily adjusted, something that cannot be done so easily in a relational database and associated software. Every time there was a simple, trivial change, we had to change five or six different components at three or four different levels of the stack, Kolin saidMongoDB also brings The Weather Channel a much-needed speed. The company has a number of emergency services that issue warnings when severe weather is imminent. When a severe weather warning is issued for a densely populated area, such as Chicago, The Weather Channel must send warnings to the thousands of users living in the affected zip codes, preferably within seconds. The company tested a number of NoSQL databases, including Cassandra, Riak, CouchDB and MongoDB, as well as MySQL, to determine which one could fastest filter a few thousand users from a much larger pool of candidates. MongoDB proved to be the best fit, able to deliver the information within seconds. In addition to The Weather Channel, other companies that use MongoDB include MetLife, Bosch, Expedia, ADP and the city of Chicago. Note: When you buy something after clicking on links in our articles, we can earn a small Read our affiliate link policy for more details. Details. Details.

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