(Main) **Digital-based artwork provides virtually unlimited flexibility;** (Inset) **Traditional printed trail maps will always have a place in delivering guest information**

Best of both

Optimising traditional trail map illustration for the digital age

Illustrated trail maps have always been an important tool for ski resorts to provide guests with vital resort information. As resorts have become more complex, so has the amount of information required to provide a visual representation of terrain, indicate services and give safety information. Creating and maintaining accurate, attractive maps can be daunting, especially as formats and uses increase with the expansion of digital media.

Twenty years ago, VistaMap set out to develop a computer-based system that would streamline the process of updating maps. "When I used to illustrate and update trail maps for the ski industry, the renderings were all hand painted: information was applied directly and each map was produced as an individual piece,"

remembers Gary Milliken, owner of VistaMap. "My goal with VistaMap was to create a single production source where maps would be easy to update, were not limited by resolution when enlarged and could be reproduced multiple times."

Not to be confused with computer-generated maps such as Google Earth, VistaMap renderings share the same qualities as hand-painted maps and are illustrated in much the same way, but offer an infinite ability to modify the elements. From rough sketch to finished art, all aspects of the map are considered. The mountain rendering is developed with guest information in place and the use of multiple layers enables information to be inserted into the art, which creates a more cohesive feel.

"When creating a map, I use any reference I can acquire: existing maps, topo maps and aerial photos," explains Milliken. "I will also visit the resort, ski the entire mountain, familiarise myself with the terrain and take my own photos. However, no one knows the mountain like those who run it and their input is vital throughout the entire process."

Resort integration

"Squaw Valley Resort is pursuing a variety of initiatives to make the mountain and village friendlier, more approachable and more navigable," says Mike Livak, senior vice president and general manager of Squaw Valley. "We have engaged in a major overhaul of our trail map and mountain signage. Trail names have been revised and consolidated, ratings refined and graphics updated to more accurately depict the mountain's terrain and scale.

"Although making these changes was complicated, ongoing support from VistaMap enabled us to review and revise the map multiple times," Livak continues. "The map evolved until we got it just right."

Vail Resorts has worked with VistaMap for more than 10 years. "Using VistaMap to make edits is the easiest, most fluid part of the process," says Steven Long of Vail Mountain, who took responsibility for the Vail trail map a year ago. The digital format of the map enables the file to be saved as any type of digital file, at any size and any resolution, providing an optimal image for a number of applications. «

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