

it's a moving experience

soundscape

GPS system drives zoo tour

The perfect partnership of GPS and recorded commentary is proving a hit on a wildlife park's safari.

Until earlier this year Port Lympne, in Kent, had been running its African Adventure tour with an automatic commentary system based on roadside 'trigger' posts, which prompted commentary recordings on its 12 fully-seated trucks to burst into life. But a combination of equipment failure and changing demand were causing problems.

The battery-powered posts which were supposed to start each section of commentary sometimes failed, and the variation in tour timings meant some announcements were being made before the tour had reached the relevant enclosure.

So the animal park upgraded to Soundscape - a commentary system which marries dependable computer technology with the accuracy of GPS, delivering the right words at exactly the right time. As it already had suitable commentary, Port Lympne Wild Animal Park chose to buy the vehicle units and software and compile the truck tour commentary itself, but manufacturer Turning Points is also a producer of high quality audio commentaries.

The practical outcome for Port Lympne has been a commentary which does not depend on timing, and requires no intervention by the driver: the vehicle unit starts when the truck is switched on, and within two minutes has 'acquired' its position from orbiting GPS satellites. From then on, relevant commentary plays when the vehicle



reaches the correct position, and the tour commentary resets itself when the truck reaches the beginning of the next tour.

Port Lympne's Nigel Davies says the ability to add to and change the African Experience 'safari' was essential: "We could change the commentary on the old system, but it wasn't easy to do. When I heard about Soundscape, I thought it was too good to be true, but it's proving reliable."

Zoos often need to relocate animals, and Soundscape can be reprogrammed to reflect this via any PC: "When we have, for example, a new baby elephant to tell our customers about, we can change the commentary to suit on a daily basis if required," said Mr Davies.

Soundscape is also being installed on an increasing number of fixed route applications, including the open-top bus tour of Copenhagen, run by Paaske Bus. This operator has chosen Soundscape's multilingual system driven by the

Caption: Soundscape is the guide for visitors on the Port Lympne safari (High-res photo available)



it's a moving experience

soundscape

same principle of GPS 'events' records of vehicle position, speed, direction and even time of the day to prompt specific commentary to play.

A similar system is in use with Bateaux London and Catamaran Cruisers, which runs sightseeing along the River Thames. In addition to the bank-side point of interest commentaries, this company wanted a loop of general information to play between trips, and for the Soundscape unit to make safety announcements as each vessel left the quay. Because the Thames' powerful tidal currents vary the speed to the vessel, Soundscape has been programmed to calculate whether there is time to play each commentary before starting it. When running with the tide, the vessel may be going too fast whereas on later journeys against the tide, there may be plenty of time to play the 'missing' commentary. In either case passengers experience a seamless, uninterrupted delivery of relevant information throughout their trip..

Coach operators too are finding Soundscape's ready-recorded European commentaries to be a big advantage. In law, drivers are only allowed to use a microphone while driving for safety-critical announcements. And co-drivers and couriers can have variable knowledge of tour routes.

Soundscape's coverage of major roads through France into Rhineland Germany, the Italian Lakes,

central Italy and Spain, are at the core of this pay-as-you-go solution. Turning Points, the company behind Soundscape, prides itself in sourcing the most authoritative tour information and recording it in professional studios, with appropriate music and high production values. Typically, adding another section to the growing coverage costs several thousand pounds.

The endorsement of these key qualities persuaded the UK's biggest coach tour operator, WA Shearings, to have the system installed on many of its European tour vehicles two years ago. As a 'fit and forget' system, Soundscape allows the driver to concentrate on his or her core duties.

So far, the Soundscape system has shown itself to be the ultimate in adaptable tour commentary, whether the operator runs coaches, boats, buses or unusual vehicles like Port Lympne's safari trucks.

“And I have to say that Turning Points are nice people to deal with,” says Port Lympne manager Nigel Davies. “They listen to what you are saying.”

● Further information, interviews with Soundscape's manufacturers, Turning Points Ltd, and for high-quality images, contact Mark Williams, 01733 333373, email mark@wideangle.wanadoo.co.uk

Key Facts

- The Soundscape system can be installed in any vehicle to deliver commentaries that are each linked to a geographical location.
- Currently, Soundscape is installed in holiday coaches, city tour buses, sightseeing boats and in vehicles on fixed routes. It works anywhere in the world.
- Pre-recorded commentary is assigned a spot on the planet's surface. As the Soundscape vehicle unit nears that point, it begins the appropriate commentary.
- Soundscape 'knows' the direction the vehicle is travelling, so determines whether the sightseer needs to look to their right or left to see the point of interest.
- Since it 'knows' the speed the vehicle is moving, Soundscape can be programmed to deliver just the right amount of commentary short commentaries at higher speeds, when the landmark will be visible for only a brief time, and longer if the vehicle is moving more slowly.
- Soundscape can even be programmed to use a commentary only on specific days of the week, or at certain times of the day there's nothing to see after dark, for example!
- Soundscape has an ever-expanding library of professionally-produced tour commentaries for major arterial routes through Europe. These are available on a pay-per-use basis.
- ★ Soundscape is also available as vehicle commentary units and the computer software which lets the user add and manage their own commentaries



Turning Points Ltd
Building 304, Kent Science Park
Sittingbourne
Kent ME9 8PX
United Kingdom
+44 (0)1795 411535