

Final Report Brief

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CrashStories

Abstract

Danielle Berger, John Hosung Lee, Ken Nadolski and Jordan Salinger developed the CrashStories interactive map for Transportation Alternatives (TA) and the course Crowd Sourced City in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University. Transportation Alternatives is an advocacy organization that seeks to promote safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists in New York City. TA asked us to create a crowd sourcing tool that would allow people to contribute photos, videos and stories that could ultimately become a layer on their CrashStat 3.0 map. Through this project, we created an interactive multimedia platform that addressed the needs of Transportation Alternatives and utilized crowd sourced data.

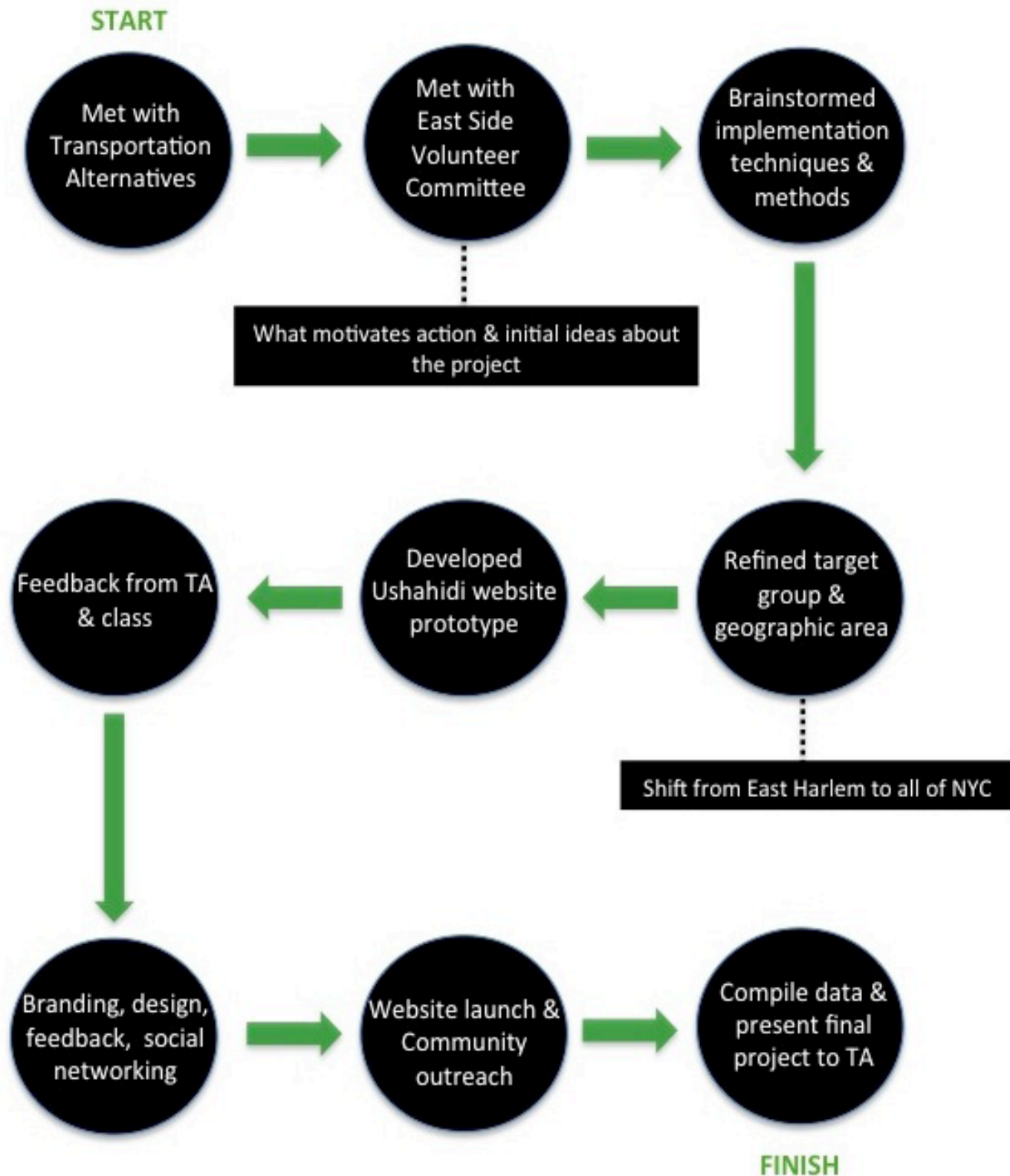
Transportation Alternatives is one of the country's leading advocacy groups for pedestrian and bicyclist safety. They work on many fronts to reduce vehicular traffic in New York City and promote bicycling, walking and public transit. Some of their recent campaigns include the East Side Action Plan, which is focused on street safety on the east side of Manhattan and Vision Zero, a plan for zero deaths, zero injuries and zero fear of traffic. TA also advocates for parking reform and the creation of "complete streets" which allows for all forms of transportation to occur safely and sustainably in the same space.

After meeting with TA, volunteer committees and active members in the cycling community, it became evident that the project would take that form of an interactive, online map which people could add data via the website, smart phone and text messaging. The goal was to get community members to submit photos, videos or written stories about their experiences on the streets of New York with the final product being a multimedia database that could ultimately be used for advocacy projects.



Image courtesy of Streetsblog.org

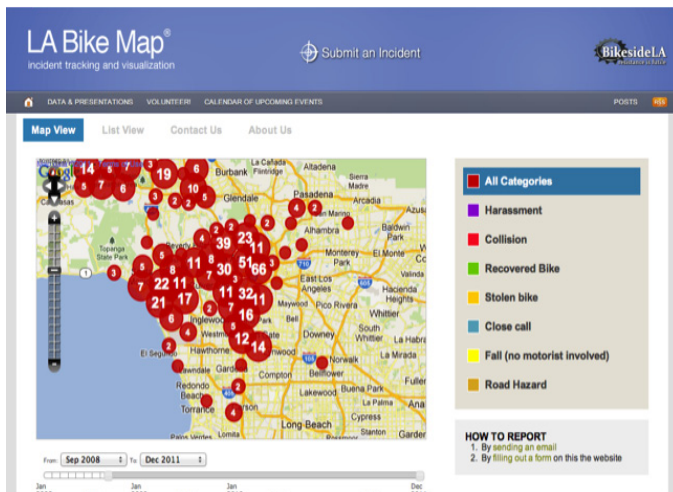
The Evolution of CrashStories



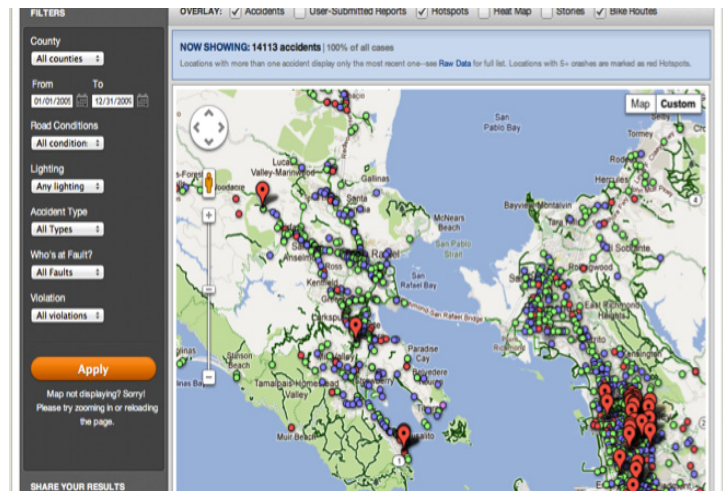
CrashStories

Our Inspiration

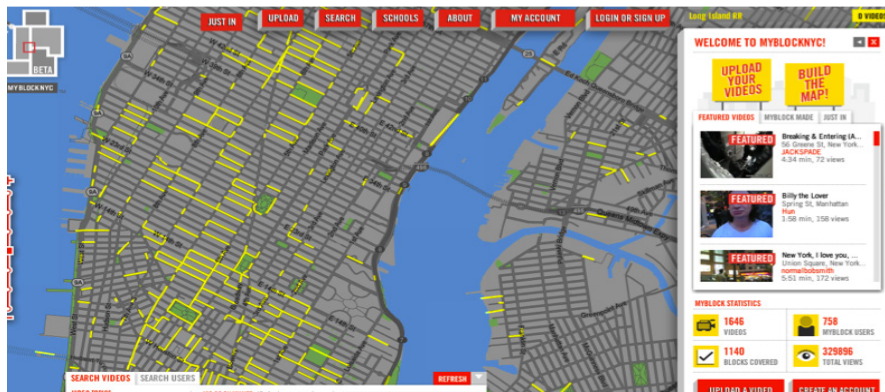
We looked to other websites that utilized Ushahidi maps, Google maps and crowd sourced data to get inspiration for the project. The simplicity of the Ushahidi map used by LA Bike Map was one we could easily replicate on our website. We liked the multimedia data that users uploaded onto MyBlockNYC.com, which is why we incorporated photo and video capabilities. The Bay Citizen's Bike Accident Tracker inspired us to reach out to biking groups around the city as target groups for gathering data and feedback during the initial pilot phases of the project. We also took design inspiration from CrashStat.org and MyBlockNYC.com both of which we felt had bold graphics and maps.



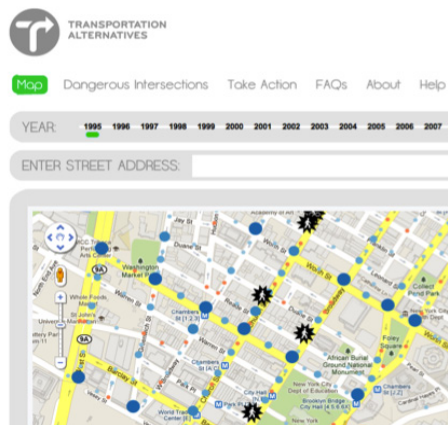
LA Bike Map



Bike Accident Tracker



MyBlockNYC.com



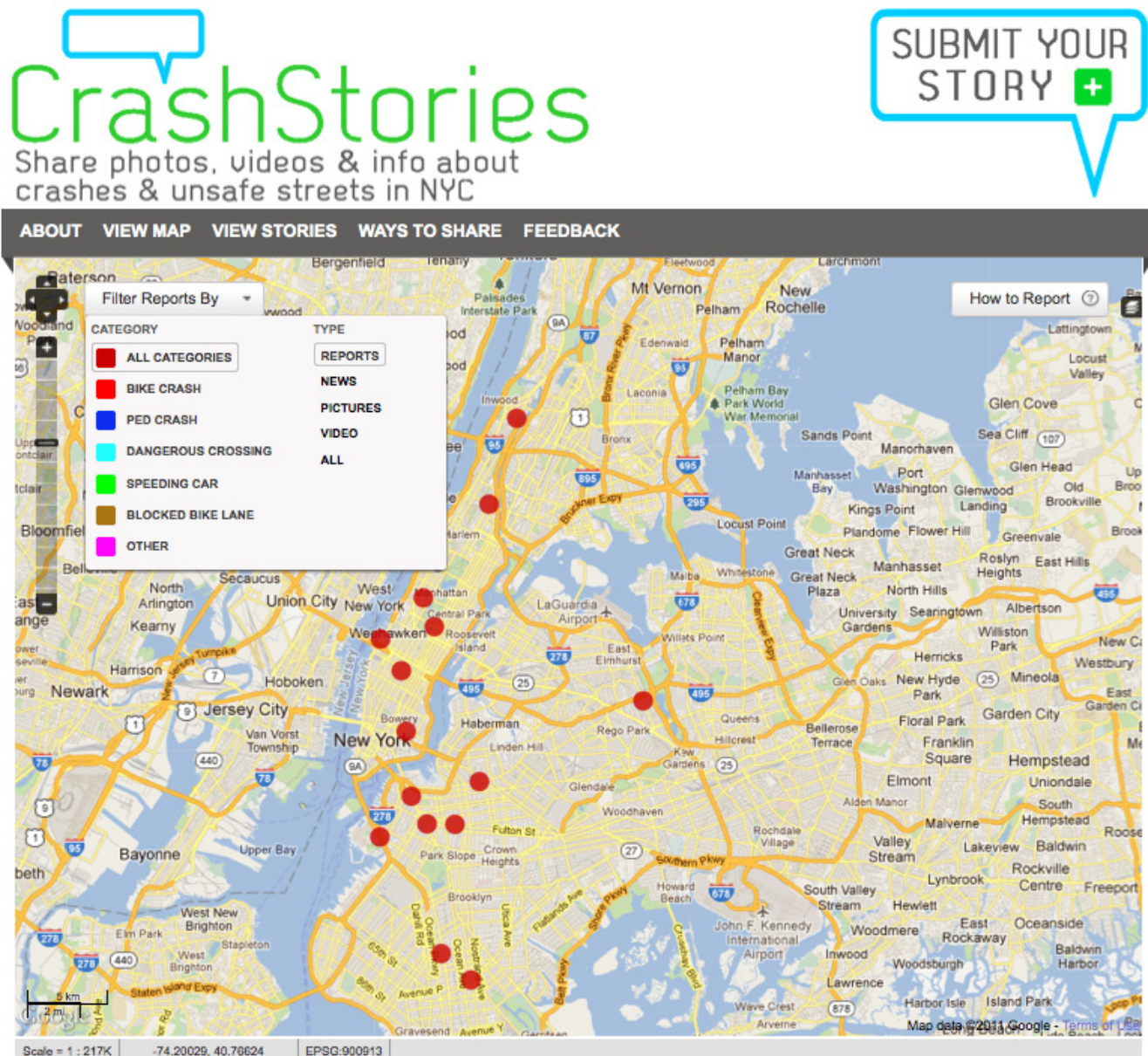
CrashStat.org

CrashStat.org

CrashStories

The Site

The usability and aesthetics of the final product were important to the success of the website. For this reason we wanted the map and the submit button to be prominent and eye-catching. We modified the tagline, so that it would tell users exactly what kinds of information we were looking for. A Facebook button was added to the bottom of every page, so that people could share the site (and any particular story) with their friends through social media. We added an “About” page to provide more information about the project, a “Ways to Share” page with directions, and a “Feedback” page so users could help us improve the site. Finally we designed the logos to have the look of CrashStat 3.0 and used the term “story” instead of report in key areas of the site. While we were pleased with the final product, we would have liked to have incorporated embedded video and would consider experimenting with a full screen map, like on MyBlockNYC.com.



Data Results

Two weeks after our beta launch we have collected 16 reports on our website. This is a combination of uploads we did from local news stories, members of the Transportation Alternatives volunteer committees and unidentified sources. Pedestrian crashes accounted for the largest number of posts. Dangerous crossings, blocked bike lanes, speeding cars, and bike crashes also garnered several posts.

While the categories we expected to get the highest number of posts--pedestrian crashes and bike crashes--did have a significant number, we were surprised that the more mundane categories also received posts. Our initial thoughts were that while the crashes cause more of a significant impact, the other infractions happen on a much more frequent basis and can be captured just as easily. For the same reason that the website “uncivil servants” succeeds in documenting parking abuse, many people are willing to expose smaller crimes.

The posts from the volunteer committees also were less image and video heavy than we had hoped, as this was something unique that our site offered. We have altered our tag line in order to increase the number of posts that have multimedia content. While some basic conclusions can be drawn from the number of posts we realize that our sample size is not large enough to really understand the behavior of those who have contributed to CrashStories.

We also set up a feedback section on our website to gather responses from those who participated in the beta launch. The feedback focused on our design, user experience, and additional elements that could benefit our site. In general the feedback in relation to design was positive. One user said, “the site looks beautiful. I will share it on Facebook – unless you tell me not to.” Another user suggested that we make it easier for users to upload photos by creating an external photo link, similar to what we did for videos. Another helpful piece of advice was that we should consider adding a print screen option to make it easier for distribution. Others advised us on ways to successfully market our site as we move forward. In general, we were surprised as the depth of information we were able to collect.



Crowd Sourcing

CrashStories is a great example of the potential of crowd sourcing from the perspective of an advocacy organization. The goal of Transportation Alternatives is to promote safer streets, and the easiest way to accomplish this is by telling a simple story advocating for that mission. This platform allows for people's experiences to be told through videos, photos, and written stories. When these data are aggregated on the map, an even larger story is told. You begin to notice notoriously dangerous intersections; neglected areas of the city become apparent, and repeat offenders are identified. These are not problems that one person can address, not even one organization, rather it is through opening the process to all members of the community that a complete story can be told. The open platform of CrashStories.org is a unique feature that is critical to the success of the project. Through the collection of data in various forms, Transportation Alternatives is able to build a multimedia database that can be used to corroborate their existing advocacy campaigns. For this reason, we feel this project successfully utilized crowd sourced data.

Conclusion

The ideal next step for CrashStories is for it to be integrated into Transportation Alternatives' CrashStat 3.0 map as a supplemental layer. From an administrative standpoint the reports would be reviewed by a member of TA's communication staff, and if the post is neither spam nor blatantly fraudulent, it should be uploaded to the map. Once the story is approved, we suggest that the story appears on the map, with the "verify" button disabled. Authenticity has always been an issue with Ushahidi maps, but in general they have been rarely misused, even when documenting war and disaster. We expect this to remain the case for CrashStories.

As a group we reached the limits of our coding and design skills. While we were quite satisfied with our final product, we think that professionals could help further our vision. In particular, MYBlockNYC, which really guided our project, would be something that we hope CrashStories could look like. Our map would fill the screen, have the embedded videos and images appear as the cursor is floated over incident site, and have a unique yet simple design style.

As this project moves past beta stage, we think that it could gain serious traction with a properly executed media launch. This would involve first reaching out to the local blogs and news organizations that report on transit issues. Even larger publications, like the New York Times frequently feature interactive maps, and might consider running an article significantly boosting the exposure of CrashStories. Our site could also be used in other municipalities, as the issues that TA advocates for in New York are relevant across the country.

Appendix

Administrator's Quick Guide to CrashStories.Org

- 1) Login to Administer the Site at CrashStories.org/admin (enter username and password)
- 2) Click "Reports" to see all pending Stories

View Reports [Create Story](#) [Comments](#) [Download Reports](#) [Upload Reports](#)

Show all Awaiting Approval Awaiting Verification

Approve Unapprove Verify/Unverify Delete

<input type="checkbox"/> Report Details	Date	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/> Crazy intersection to attempt to bike thru This intersection doesn't have any bike or pedestrian infrastructure, and it separates two neighborhoods that are great for biking.... More Location: Red Hook, Brooklyn, United States Submitted By Georgia Bullen via WEB Categories: Dangerous Crossing Edit Log: (1)	2011-12-08	Approve Verify Delete

- 3) Click to Approve each Story (or delete the ones you do not wish to approve)
- 4) Click on "Comments" to review the comments.

[View Reports](#) [Create Story](#) **Comments** [Download Reports](#) [Upload Reports](#)

Show all Pending Approved Spam

APPROVE UNAPPROVE SPAM NOT SPAM DELETE

<input type="checkbox"/> Comment Details	Date	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/> Ken In response to: 10th Ave near Dyckman I've noticed this dangerous crossing too. It is really bad. Email: knn2125@columbia.edu IP Address: 67.243.40.213 Comment Rating: 0	2011-12-07	Approved Spam Delete

- 5) Approve or delete the comments
- 6) Congratulations, you just moderated CrashStories.org!