MTH Electric Trains

Crafting A User Experience For Hobbyists To Love

SpinDance

MTH Electric Trains Case Study
Crafting A User Experience For Hobbyists To Love

MTH Electric Trains

MTH Electric Trains designs and manufactures premium model trains and components. Based in Columbia, Maryland, the company markets products under the RailKing, Realtrax, Tinplate Traditions, and Digital Command Systems brands. It also produces replicas of classic Lionel-branded products.

Challenge

MTH Electric Trains' Digital Command System (DCS) empowers hobbyists to control their layouts using a wireless handheld controller. Billed as "Simply the Best Way to Run a Railroad," the system supports an impressive set of features, including the ability to control 99 engines at the same time. The original DCS handheld remote was an instant hit with MTH customers, re-sembling a television remote and communicating with the layouts through radio frequency (RF).

But as powerful as the original handheld remote was, MTH knew the future of DCS was in powerful and flexible mobile devices. This led to a search for a partner that not only knew mobile software development, but that also understood the unique challenges of integrating mobile software with embedded hardware.

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Solution

MTH selected SpinDance to develop custom mobile iOS and Android applications that would replicate and extend the functionality of the handheld remote. SpinDance engineers worked closely with MTH staff to craft a user experience hobbyists would love. Together, MTH and SpinDance defined an entirely new method of interacting with trains that wasn't possible using the original remote.

Features of the solution include:

- Leveraging existing hardware, protecting the investment made by MTH and hobbyists alike.

- Automatically discovering the train's wifi module, and querying engines to determine which features they supported.

- Presenting a user interface tailored around the unique features of the model engines.

- Controlling multiple engines at the same time—including trains from other vendors!

- Supporting lifelike features including speed, bells, whistles, horns, and smoke.

- Controlling track accessories like switches and lights.

Results

The initial iOS and Android apps were an instant hit with MTH enthusiasts, and MTH quickly moved to develop a premium application that added even more features to enhance the experience. "SpinDance continues to be a great partner," said Dave Krebiehl, VP of Research and Development at MTH. "Their collective work ethic and dedication to our projects ensures success."

SpinDance is proud to partner with MTH, and looks forward to rolling together into the future.

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CONTACT
hello@spindance.com
(616) 355-7000 x114

HOLLAND OFFICE
238 South River Avenue
Holland, Michigan 49423

GRAND RAPIDS OFFICE
1595 Galbraith Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546