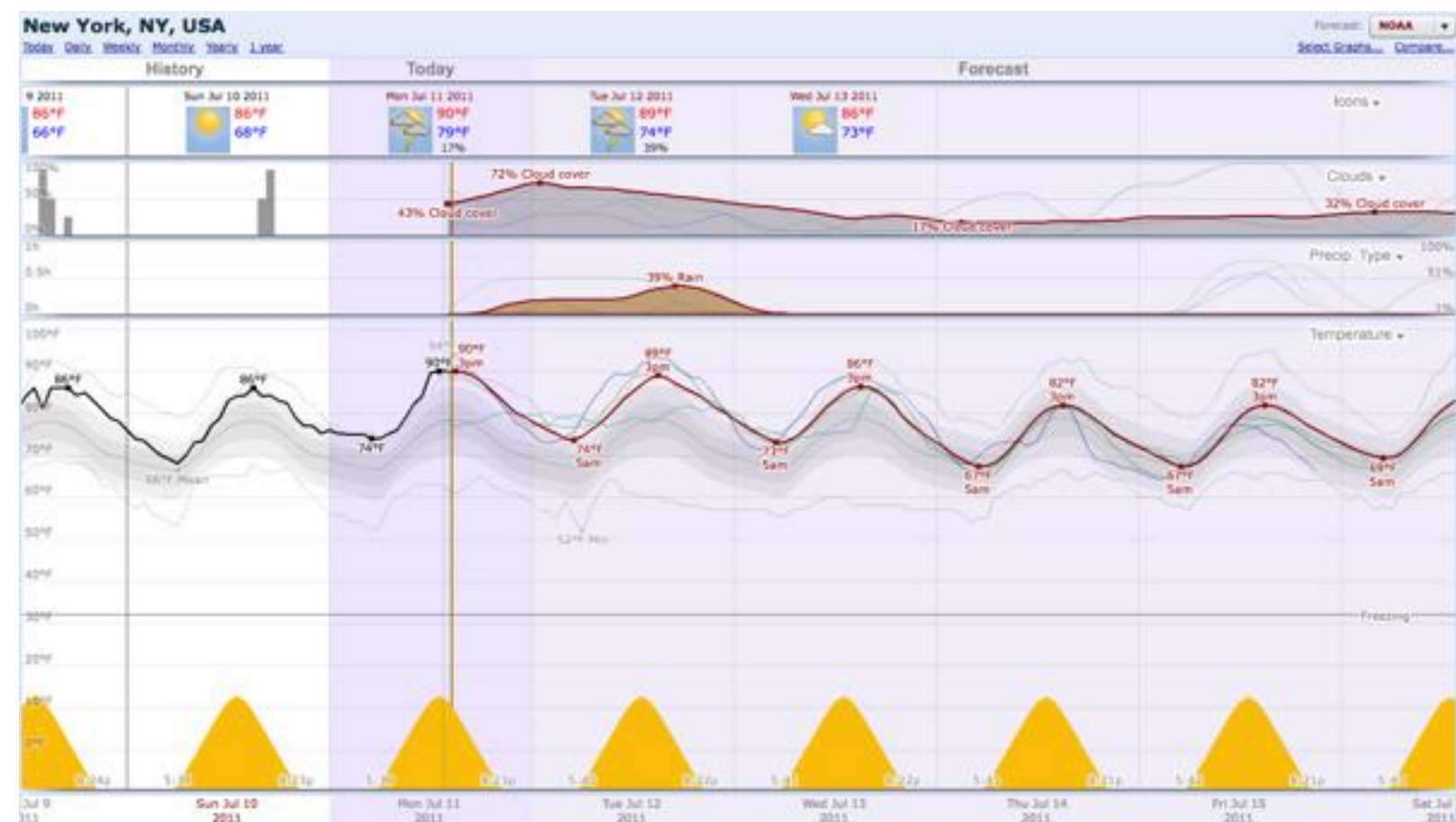# WeatherSpark Offers Design-Friendly 'Data Utopia'

By Joe Fieber, TechNewsDaily Contributor
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There are plenty of weather websites to choose from, each offering slightly different features. If you want all features in one place, plus a few more, then WeatherSpark is a site to consider. "Beautiful Weather Graphs and Maps" is their motto, but that doesn't even begin to describe WeatherSpark's data utopia.

Just over 9 months old, WeatherSpark is the creation of San Francisco's Jacob Norda and James Diebel. Inspired by Google Maps and Google Finance's interactive graphing tool for stocks, the pair set out to create a weather site that would provide people with rich weather information: detailed, accurate, complete and contextualized.

Historical data

On most sites, historical weather data is either unavailable or difficult to find, but on WeatherSpark, such data plays a prominent role. Diebel points out "you can not only see the averages of all the major weather variables down to the hour level at any of more than 4,000 weather stations worldwide, you can also see percentiles that bound the variability of those averages, median values in cases where the average is too sensitive to outliers, and density plots where the distribution is multimodal, such as with wind direction."

You might think that would be too much information, but it's displayed in a way that is quite readable and includes descriptive hover-overs.

This thoughtfulness about how data can best be displayed and understood is applied to all the weather information you'd expect to find, and even a few you don't normally see, including:

- Cloud cover
- Sunrise and sunset
- Precipitation type, amount, and rate
- Humidity
- Pressure
- Wind speed and direction

Also, the data displayed can be changed to reflect forecasts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, met.no, World Weather Online and Weather Central.

Maps

WeatherSpark's creators have paid just as much attention to their weather map. You can either view the map next to the graphs, or click a tab for a full screen plain or terrain view that can include temperature, dew point, wind, pressure or humidity. The map is fully zoomable, clearly displays when it was last updated, and most impressively, can replay an animated radar that spans anywhere from 1 to 120 hours; users can also control the speed and duration of the radar.

Travel

An area that most sites don't address well is travel planning. "People tend to book vacations months or at least weeks in advance," Diebel said. "And forecasts are just not useful on that time scale. I have personally used our records and averages as a sort of long-range forecast for every trip I've taken since we launched the site and have found it extremely useful in selecting where and when to go, and what to bring when I do go."

Not sure where you're traveling next? WeatherSpark can help there as well with its ability to display data for up to four cities at the same time.

For now, the site is in beta and is evolving quickly, with new features and improvements being added at a rapid pace. Eventually monetization using ads, premium features or referrals may become necessary, though the site's creators say they are not worried about that now.