

Microsoft launches redesigned map search with apps

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(AP) -- Microsoft Corp. is releasing an updated version of its mapping service with street-level views and new "apps" that tack on tweets, traffic and other location-specific data.

The new version of Bing Maps, released Wednesday in a "beta" test mode, offers slicker technology so users can zoom in more smoothly from the high-up graphical map to the close-up views showing actual streets from a pedestrian or driver's [viewpoint](#).

With this version of Bing Maps, Microsoft matches [Google Inc.](#) in sending cars with cameras down streets to capture images of every block. Microsoft is offering that in 56 U.S. cities for now, while Google has hit all 50 states and expanded the feature overseas.

Microsoft also used lasers to scan the buildings and constructed a three-dimensional map of those cities.

That makes it possible to add on collections of images built with Microsoft's Photosynth tool, which stitches and layers together multiple photos of the same location to build a [virtual model](#).

For the user, that means not only being able to stand in front of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, but also being able to "walk" inside to see photos of the art tourists have uploaded.

Clicking a small button at the bottom of the screen pulls up a library of Map apps. Each of the 15 or so apps currently available overlays some type of data on top of the map. One scatters pinpoints for local shops, restaurants and other businesses; another gives a view of recent Twitter messages. There's another that calls up images of roadside sculptures created by an outside site, VirtualGlobeTrotting.com.

[Microsoft](#) said eventually more apps from outside developers will be available.

Bing Maps uses Silverlight, Microsoft's answer to Adobe Inc.'s Flash, so a small plug-in available for most Mac and PC browsers is required.

On the Net: <http://www.bing.com/maps/explore>

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