

Website, Google Earth offer 3-D views of Hawaii

July 15 2010, By HERBERT A. SAMPLE , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- A new website backed by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar says it will offer potential visitors to Hawaii the ability to view hotels, shops and tourist attractions in three dimensions and from different angles in an interactive virtual tour.

Team Vision Virtual launched 3DHawaii.com on Thursday, promoting the website as the "next generation travel-planning and booking tool."

The company has signed up three dozen hotels and stores, which can be viewed on the site along with almost 2,000 beaches, museums and other tourist attractions - from Kilauea volcano on the Big Island to Saint Damien's grave on Molokai and the Duke Kahanamoku statue in Waikiki.

Hawaii is the first of 10 states for which the Honolulu-based company plans to build a similar 3-D portal incorporating [Google Earth](#) technology. The popular software program provides access to the world's geographical information through digital maps, [satellite imagery](#) and Google's search tools.

Bruce Polderman, product manager for Google Earth, said 3DHawaii's use of Google Earth technology is impressive and called the website an "innovative approach to vacation planning."

Viewers can virtually fly around computer-generated images of hotel exteriors, and the free website provides access to photos and videos of

hotel lobbies, rooms, swimming pools and other features.

Craig Carapelho, CEO of Team Vision Virtual, said the idea came when Google released software about two years ago that made its Google Earth program Web-based.

"We thought, 'Wow, this is our opportunity to create Hawaii in 3-D, where you can click on everything, whether it's a restaurant, an activity, a beach, a park, a hiking trail," he said.

The website links to the hotels' own booking sites, although 3DHawaii.com will not immediately offer a method of comparing hotel prices.

The difference between 3DHawaii.com and established travel websites such as Expedia, Travelocity and Orbitz is its breadth of information about [Hawaii](#) accommodations and tourist attractions, he said, referring to the popular travel-booking sites. The others also are more price-driven, he added.

"We're looking for people who are trying to plan their experience," Carapelho said.

The website does not offer the type of experience with which moviegoers wearing special glasses might be familiar. Instead, it allows viewers to navigate around the outside of locations and to see them in depth.

The website also provides Google Earth and Google Maps views of streets near those locations.

The textured, colored computer graphics of individual hotels were created from thousands of aerial and ground-level photos, Carapelho

said. The sprawling Hilton Hawaiian Village in Waikiki, for example, required some 4,000 photographs.

Carapelho's firm, which generally focuses on marketing, advertising and public relations, has been working on the project for three years. In April, Omidyar came on as the site's lead investor, via his Ohana Holdings LLC, with an undisclosed amount of capital.

Hotels and other clients pay a fee to participate in the site, and can track how many users click on links to go from 3DHawaii.com to their own sites.

Leading the tech aspect is Paul Onnen, formerly chief technology officer at Expedia Inc. and director of engineering at [Google](#) in Switzerland.

Carapelho would not disclose what other states he plans to tackle next, but hopes to launch the second site this fall and the remaining eight by the end of next year.

More information: <http://3dhawaii.com/>

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