

Google turns to users for guidance on US maps

April 19 2011, By MICHAEL LIEDTKE , AP Technology Writer



(AP) -- Google Inc. doesn't hesitate to seek directions when it comes to trying to improve its online mapping service.

That's why [Google](#) is asking its users to add more details to its U.S. maps. The suggested revisions can be made beginning Tuesday through an editing tool that already has been used to create and refine maps in 183 other countries since 2005.

Google, which is based in Mountain View, didn't rush to introduce the map-making service in the U.S. because it already had a good lay of the land in its home country. It decided instead to concentrate on filling in the gaps in other parts of the world where [digital maps](#) were far more primitive or completely unavailable.

As comprehensive as Google's U.S. maps are, the [Internet search](#) leader believes they can get a lot better with the help of citizen cartographers.

Google is hoping people will be willing to volunteer to designate where their favorite neighborhood hangouts are or perhaps label all the buildings on the campus of their alma mater or a nearby university. Other local knowledge conceivably could be used to plot which streets have bike lanes or the locations of community parks.

All proposed changes submitted through <http://mapmaker.google.com> will be reviewed for mistakes before they appear in Google's [mapping service](#). Google will rely on volunteer moderators in addition to using its computer to track the trustworthiness of the users who log into the mapmaking service.

Calling upon the collective knowledge of users with expertise in particular topics is similar to the approach used to create [Wikipedia](#), the Internet's leading online encyclopedia. Although Wikipedia has published some embarrassing mistakes during its 10-year history, it has proven reliable enough to become one of the Internet's most frequented destinations.

Google says it also has found citizen cartographers to be diligent and accurate in the other countries where the map-editing tools already have been available.

The quest to make Google's maps more revealing has gotten the company into trouble previously.

The biggest backlash has been directed at a "Street View" feature that provides photographic images of many cities in the online maps. Street View initially provoked privacy complaints because Google published photos that included people in public places or activities that they didn't

want to be posted online.

Last year, Google revealed that the cars also had been equipped with software that vacuumed up personal e-mail and other data from users on unprotected wireless networks in neighborhoods where the company's picture-taking cars had been cruising. Google says it didn't discover the cars had the snooping software until it responded to a regulatory inquiry.

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