

Internet age navigation drives economies

January 30 2013, by Glenn Chapman



The Google Maps app is seen on an Apple iPhone 4S on December 13, 2012 in Fairfax, California. Google on Wednesday touted studies showing that Internet Age navigation tools boost the economic engines of nations.

Fresh from unveiling detailed online maps of North Korea, Google on Wednesday touted studies showing that Internet Age navigation tools boost the economic engines of nations.

The global "geospatial industry" brings in \$270 billion in annual revenue and companies in the sector pay more than \$90 billion in wages each

year, according to a report by economic consulting firm Oxera.

Firms working with global [satellite positioning](#), [digital maps](#) and navigation systems are a "promising engine for economic activity now" and will grow by 30 percent annually, according to Oxera.

"If policymakers, private companies, researchers and consumers continue to invest in this emerging industry, we can expect this technology to continue driving growth in the broader [global economy](#)," Oxera said in its report.

Geospatial technology has ripple effects ranging from making it easier for someone with a smartphone to find a nearby cafe to efficiently routing shipments or figuring out the best place to open a shop or place a billboard.

Oxera estimated that businesses worldwide have saved \$17.3 billion due to time saved by using navigation technology and that people had a total of 1.1 billion hours lopped from their travel time.

Charlie Hale, of [Google Maps](#)' public policy team, described the geospatial industry as companies dealing in maps and [navigation devices](#).

Major shipping firm UPS uses modern navigation technology to plot efficient delivery routes, taking into account weather, altitude, road pitch and myriad other factors, according to Hale.

Governments tap into [mapping technology](#) for a range of needs, from disaster responses to urban planning and improving mass transit systems.

"The key is that we shouldn't take it for granted," Hale said. "Policy makers need to support making map data available and private companies like ours need to keep investing in this."

Companies and countries with modern map skills and data have economic and competitive advantages, he argued, citing the Oxera study and a US-focused study by Boston Consulting Group.

"It is like any technology transition," Hale said. "If you were a small business 50 years ago, your marketing could be the yellow pages and those with TV ads had competitive advantage."

Now, businesses that are easy to find on [online maps](#) have an edge.

Evidence is even growing that people with better grasps of digital era mapping and navigation technologies earn higher incomes, according to Hale, who confessed to being the son of a geography teacher in Maine.

"It is about being able to use satellite imagery, GPS, all the tools the average global worker is going to have to rely on," he said.

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