

# Google's startup brings sightseeing app to Glass (Update)

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Google Glass, a spectacle-like computing device drawing lots of attention, can serve as an automated tour guide with the help of a new application from a little-known startup hatched within the Internet's most powerful company.

The app, called "Field Trip," is being released Wednesday by Google-owned Niantic Labs for the 10,000 people currently testing an early model of Glass known as the Explorer edition. It becomes just the ninth app to be approved by Google Inc. for use on Glass during an experimental phase. The device's mass market release is expected early next year.

Other Glass apps, or "Glassware," are from The New York Times, Facebook, Twitter, Path, Evernote, CNN, Tumblr and Elle magazine. Google is working with developers to add even more apps to the line-up.

Once given permission, Field Trip tracks a user's whereabouts so it can automatically deliver alerts and informational snapshots about nearby historical landmarks, tourist attractions, restaurants and other local merchants in neighborhoods all over the world. The descriptions of locations flagged by Field Trip are pulled from more than 130 online sources.

A version of Field Trip built for smartphones already has won a following. Field Trip apps for the iPhone and Android-powered phones have been installed on more than 500,000 devices since their release

nearly a year ago.

Field Trip creator Niantic Labs is a Google division set up to operate as an independent startup. It is staffed by a few dozen people within a sprawling company that generates more than \$50 billion in annual revenue.

Google CEO Larry Page approved the unorthodox arrangement as a way to retain John Hanke, who had been overseeing the team responsible for the company's widely used mapping products.

Much of the mapping technology came from Google's 2004 acquisition of Keyhole, a startup run by Hanke. As Google grew larger, Hanke became eager to return to his entrepreneurial roots and was planning to strike out on his own again in late 2010 until Page convinced him that he should build his next project within Google.

Having already made it easier for people to get to where they want to go with Google Maps, Hanke was interested in coming up with ways to educate people about their destinations.

"I had this anxiety knowing that there was a lot of useful information on the Web about local sights that wasn't showing up on maps," Hanke, 46, said.

The quest to dig up more pearls of knowledge inspired Hanke to christen his startup Niantic, which refers to a whaling vessel that came to San Francisco during the Gold Rush of 1849, only to be abandoned. The ship was briefly converted into a hotel that later burned down. The remains of the original ship were later found buried near a current San Francisco landmark, the Transamerica Pyramid.

The Niantic name is meant to serve as a reminder that "there is lot of

cool stuff beneath the surface of things," Hanke said.

The former location of the old Niantic ship and hotel isn't hidden because it's designated as California Historical Landmark. Ironically, the Field Trip app for the iPhone didn't call out this historic distinction even as a reporter stood in front of a plaque placed on the side of a building where the Niantic once stood.

Besides Field Trip, Niantic has built a video game called Ingress that requires players to visit buildings of historical significance and other real-world locations to acquire the weapons needed to score points and accumulate power. The game so far can only be played on personal computers and mobile devices. Hanke declined to say whether Niantic is trying to build an Ingress app for Glass, too.

Field Trip appears to be ideally suited for Glass, which is worn like a pair of spectacles so users don't have to tie up their hands fiddling with a smartphone or tablet. Glass contains a hidden computer, a thumbnail-size transparent display screen above the right eye and a camera for shooting hands-free photos and videos with voice commands.

The Field Trip app is designed to alert Glass users when they are passing a building with a colorful history or a local landmark, along with tips on places to eat and shop. When something interesting pops up, a Glass user can choose to have Field Trip narrate the information through the device's bone conduction speaker.

Although Field Trip works in any situation, Hanke believes it will be particularly useful for people traveling to a new area or just looking to do some local sightseeing. When he recently visited Rome with his family, Hanke said the Field Trip app "was almost blowing up in my pocket because there was so much interesting stuff around me. And I didn't have to fumble around with a guide book to check it all out."

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