

Google free mapping service adds local guides

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An update to Google's free online map service lets users become local guides who post reviews of businesses and venues

An update to Google's free online map service on Friday let users become local guides who post reviews of businesses and venues in a challenge to Yelp.

Local Guides was described by Google as a global community of the top

reviewers who reap benefits based on how much they post about businesses they visit.

Perks promised Local Guides ranged from access to a monthly news letter to being featured on the Internet titan's Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ pages along with being sent an annual gift for "high-quality contributions" to Google Maps.

The move came as a challenge to "Yelp's Elite" program that rewards people for getting into the upper echelon of voices at the crowd-sourced reviews service.

Facebook last month launched a new feature that automatically provides tips about places where members of the social network might be, potentially challenging Yelp and other review websites.

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