

Waze turning road warriors into map builders

September 25 2009



Technology startup Waze is tapping into the collective knowledge of road warriors in order to make life more pleasant for drivers while creating reliable street maps. Drivers can upload comments, along with pictures, from along their routes to alert fellow "wazers" to anything from accidents or detours to a favorite place to grab a cup of coffee.

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A free Waze: Way to Go service that proved its worth in Israel is making its US debut, inviting motorists to use smart phones to keep one another in the know about speed traps, short cuts, hazards, accidents and more.

"It seems like a silly thing, but it is addictive," Waze chief executive

Noam Bardin said while demonstrating the service for AFP.

"There is this feeling that you are not alone... Some people just like knowing someone else is out there."

Satellite tracking technology commonly built into [smart phones](#) lets Waze automatically measure traffic flow while simultaneously verifying or modifying public street information in its database.

Motorists "teach" Waze computers where roads are and how best to maneuver about simply by driving.

Drivers can upload comments, along with pictures, from along their routes to alert fellow "wazers" to anything from accidents or detours to a favorite place to grab a cup of coffee. Waze also provides users with turn-by-turn directions.

While Waze's acts as a handy, free navigation tool for drivers it is, at its core, a "wiki" style approach to map making: Waze users are essentially feeding updated street information to the service every time they drive.

The crowd-sourcing approach is expected to produce up-to-date street maps that will compete with offerings from leading mapping data firms Navteq and Tele Atlas.

Navteq and Tele Atlas dispatch fleets of specially equipped trucks to gather data they in turn sell to firms that provide Internet mapping and in-car navigation services.

"We plan to come out with cheaper, better maps built from scratch," Bardin said.

"We are very much about folks driving their daily commutes or local

routes. You might know a better way to get someplace; fine, drive it and you've taught us."

Waze features include outlining routes considered fastest, shortest, popular, or most environmentally friendly.

"We've found that people have started using our application to build maps all over the world," Bardin said. "By year's end, we plan to open up internationally."

The project was named "Freemap" when it was launched in Israel in 2006 and data collection for a "live" map of that country is almost complete.

Waze plans to make money by eventually charging for map data and premium navigation services.

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Citation: Waze turning road warriors into map builders (2009, September 25) retrieved 22 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-09-waze-road-warriors-builders.html>

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