

Google Street View finally captures missing Austria

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A Google Street View vehicle pictured on a road in central London

Google's Street View cars on Thursday started taking images in Austria, the only EU country along with Germany to remain largely absent from the popular online service showing 360-degree pictures of places around the world.

The project, launched in 2007, lets computer users view panoramic [street](#) scenes on Google Maps and take a virtual "walk" through cities.

The photos are processed in the United States, where details such as faces and registration plates are automatically blurred before being published on Google Maps.

Some countries have been reluctant to grant Google access because of worries linked to data collection.

In 2010, Google had begun to roll out its service in Austria and neighbouring Germany but was ordered to halt operations over alleged privacy breaches.

The company admitted that vehicles had accidentally recorded personal data from wireless networks.

Although Austria lifted its temporary ban a year later, Street View decided not to return to the alpine nation—until now.

The fresh start was timed to coincide with Street View's 10-year anniversary, Google said in a statement.

Cars equipped with special cameras will tour Vienna, Linz and Graz until November.

"The official launch of Street View in Austria is expected to happen in six to twelve months," Google Austria spokesman Wolfgang Fasching-Kapfenberger told AFP.

Under Austrian law, Street View cars will only be allowed to capture photos but not videos.

The service still has a very low penetration rate in Germany, which has some of Europe's strictest privacy laws due to the abuses under its Nazi and communist dictatorships.

As a special concession to privacy concerns, Germans can have their homes or businesses pixelated, as well as opt out of the service altogether.

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