

December 19, 2005

THE JOURNAL REPORT: TECHNOLOGY

E-Commerce

Where in the World Is...

Take Google Maps. Add some data. Find anything.

By **JESSICA E. VASCELLARO**
 Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
 December 19, 2005; Page R8

Ever wonder where you'd end up if you dug a hole in the backyard and went straight through the Earth?

Well, there's an online map that can save you the digging. In fact, it's getting easier to find just about anything anywhere, thanks to Web sites that are taking mapping to a whole new level.

THE JOURNAL REPORT

See the complete [Technology report](#)¹.


Known as mashups, they are essentially combining online maps with lists of data that allow users to pinpoint anything in a very specific location -- from real-estate listings and job openings to the locations of public bathrooms on a marathon route to, yes, where that hole in the backyard will lead you.

Attracting Attention

Spawning the creation of mashups is search engine **Google Inc.**'s recent decision to open up the programming behind its Google Maps tool to anyone, free of charge. The Maps tool, which was released earlier this year, allows users to easily find a location by panning across a map simply by moving a mouse's cursor or by zooming in or out. Users of some maps can even see satellite photos, down to the trees in a front yard. So, unlike a Web site that yields a list of search results within a specified distance, mashups using the Maps tool allow users to zoom in to view listings within an area as narrow as a single street or as wide as the entire country. And because each location is pinpointed on a map, it's easy for browsers to assess the distance between listings.

Individual programmers have been the first to seize on the technology and turn mundane lists into such interactive maps. But some larger businesses are starting to use mashups as a way to gain exposure and boost traffic to their sites. While they won't make money from actual consumer use of the tool -- Google doesn't currently allow sites that use its Maps tool to charge for access -- companies are hoping that

DOW JONES REPRINTS

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit: www.djreprints.com.

- [See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)
- [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

increased customer visits will translate into more sales. Some companies also collect modest revenue from running Google text ads alongside search results. And as mashups grow, some observers wonder when and how Google itself will get in the game.

Google Maps "adds another dimension to sites that are otherwise dry and boring," says Safa Rashtchy, an analyst who covers Google for Piper Jaffray & Co. in Palo Alto, Calif. "So a lot of Web sites are putting them in there as a search feature to create more traffic."

Microsoft Corp. and **Yahoo Inc.** also have released the programming technology for their mapping services. But they haven't been as widely adopted for mashups, in part, some programmers say, because Google has a more attractive and easier-to-use interface. Unlike Mountain View, Calif.-based Google, Yahoo also requires users to request written permission if they want to put the technology to commercial use.

MORE THAN DIRECTIONS

A sampling of the services Web sites have developed using Google's Maps tool.

- [WalkJogRun.net](#)²

Calculates distances and estimates travel times for any jogging route you create by clicking on a Google map. You can also view preloaded routes.

- [CellReception.com/towers](#)³

Brings up a Google map of nearby cellular towers when you enter a city name or ZIP Code. Also provides comments about coverage and signal strength in nearby areas for multiple carriers.

- [Local.alkemis.com](#)⁴

A map of live traffic cameras in New York City. Allows you to access local travel information through streaming video of some Manhattan intersections.

- [HardtoRemember.org/fastfood](#)⁵

A map of fast-food locations across the U.S. Contains more than 27,000 listings, with color-coded tacks for McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King and Jack in the Box. (See map above)

- [SkiBonk.com](#)⁶

A map of some U.S. and European ski resorts along with data about the number of open lifts and recent snow conditions. Users can also click through the condition reports to access trail maps.

- [81Nassau.com/apnews](#)⁷

This map plots the locations of recent U.S. news stories from the Associated Press. Users can click on each location to view the first few sentences of the story or link to the full article.

Promotional Tool

The Jeep division of **DaimlerChrysler AG** has built an advertising campaign around a mashup tracking a family's drive cross-country. Users are rewarded with entries into a Jeep sweepstakes for participating in a virtual treasure hunt powered by Google Maps. Users hunt down a cache on a Google map at the end of short video clips about the family's journey. The auto maker, which has hosted promotional real-life trips where participants locate troves using global positioning systems, turned to Google Maps as a convenient way to move these adventures online.

A company spokeswoman says the campaign, launched in October, has drawn more than 280,000 visitors to the Web site.

Other mashups let you locate more conventional things. Job-matching service Jobster Inc. added a mashup to its Web site last summer. Users who enter the type of job they are looking for are presented with a Google map covered with related job openings nationwide. Job seekers also can limit their searches by area or check out their competition with a tool that maps all the jobs being searched for by Jobster users at that moment.

Since the mashup was launched in June, traffic to the Seattle-based site has climbed to about a million searches a month, up from around 600,000, according to Jobster Chief Executive Jason Goldberg. And the number of employers who pay to promote job opportunities on the service has more than doubled. Mr. Goldberg says the maps have made his site more successful by making it more interactive and engaging.

Trulia Inc. is a San Francisco-based mashup of real-estate listings for several West Coast cities. The site allows you to search for listings by city and zoom in to see a satellite image of particular properties. The site currently has about half a dozen sponsored advertisers, who pay for links to their sites to appear throughout the [Trulia.com](#)⁸ site.

Pete Flint, Trulia's chief executive, says the model for how the company charges advertisers is currently in flux, but that pay per click will be a big component. He says plans for revenue growth may include hosting more sponsored advertisers, housing links to realtors' home pages or running Google AdWords advertisements. AdWords are small snippets of ad text linked to keyword searches. Advertisers buy ads linked to certain keywords. Every time someone clicks on an ad, the site operator gets a cut from Google.

Some mashup operators are exploring other revenue options, such as charging consumers for more specialized mashups or charging companies for market research culled from the sites. Jobster's Mr. Goldberg says that while its basic mashups will probably remain free, the company is considering a premium service where it would sell information about which job listings are hot to employers and advertisers.

Vikash Patel of San Jose, Calif., who owns affiliate marketing company Hollowlake Ventures, launched MapBid.com in October as a way to make money through online auction site **eBay** Inc.'s affiliate program, which gives people a cut of eBay's commission on sales they refer to the site. MapBid.com displays a map locating items being auctioned on eBay from people within a specified distance of a given ZIP Code, and then links users directly to the eBay site. Mr. Patel gets around 60% of the fees eBay collects from sales made through that link.

While the mashup has only earned him around \$200 so far, Mr. Patel says he expects to start generating thousands of dollars within the next six months, after he starts advertising on several search engines.

Avoiding Conflict

Some mashups, however, are finding revenue growth constrained by stipulations placed on their data use.

Paul Rademacher created a mashup, HousingMaps.com⁹, using nationwide real-estate listings from online classifieds giant Craigslist Inc. of San Francisco. But he says he doesn't include any advertising on the site, in part to avoid a potential conflict with Craigslist. (Mr. Rademacher says he created his mashup by hacking the Maps technology before it was released. He now works for Google as a software engineer and runs the mashup on the side.)

Jim Buckmaster, Craigslist's chief executive, says the company generally releases its listings only to noncommercial sites, in order to prevent the company's servers from overloading. He says earlier this year, Craigslist forced its listings to be removed from Oodle, a search engine for local classifieds that also runs a mashup of its listings, due to server problems and the fact that the company was using the Craigslist name in its press releases.

But Mr. Buckmaster says that in response to the popularity of HousingMaps.com, the company is likely to launch its own some time next year and will continue to monitor programmers' activities carefully to ensure that they don't overload Craigslist's servers and thereby hurt its own visitors.

Debates between listing services like Craigslist and programmers harvesting their data are likely to flare up as mashup operators try turning their sites into money makers, says Andrew Goodman, principal of online advertising firm Page Zero Media in Toronto. In the end, he predicts, only those people with highly specialized listings that can't be found elsewhere on the Web will maintain the leverage to charge for

their data, while the others will make it free in the hopes of getting extra exposure.

As mashups become more numerous, observers wonder if and when Google will try to cash in.

Bret Taylor, product manager for Google Local, a search tool that can display local businesses in proximity to a given location, says Google may decide in the future to require mashups using the Maps platform to run Google ads. He says such ads have been a very effective model for the company in the past. But for now, Mr. Taylor says, the platform is a freebie for programmers that helps further the Google brand.

Google's Next Move

Still, analysts see the search engine making some kind of move in the future. Some say the most likely scenario is Google integrating its AdWords advertisements into the Maps technology and requiring mashups to display AdWords. Some mashups now use keyword-advertising programs from Google rivals like Yahoo.

Other potential revenue generators may include taking a cut of paid services run by individual mashup creators or starting to charge for the Maps technology itself.

Google may even consider mashups of its own by integrating the Maps tools into its own empire of information, says Peter Hershberg, managing partner of Reprise Media, a New York-based search marketing firm. For instance, Google might allow users to locate a merchant and then connect to it directly using the company's new GoogleTalk service, which allows people to instant message or talk over their computers free of charge.

A similar process already is possible through the company's new Google Local for mobile, which allows cellphone users to search for a listing, locate the merchant on a map, and click to call the merchant.

Google won't comment on any specific future plans for generating revenue from the Local service, which currently runs no ads and is free to consumers excluding Internet data fees. Eileen Rodriguez, a spokeswoman at Google, says the company would consider consumer feedback when considering whether to include any advertising in the future.

Mr. Taylor says Google's plans won't derail the mashup trend, since mashups typically feature data more targeted and quirky than what Google is interested in, citing, for instance, a mashup that helps runners plan their bathroom breaks.

But mashups will still be on the lookout. "We definitely have an eager eye on what they are doing," says Mr. Flint of Trulia.

He adds, however, that even if Google were to launch a real-estate mapping search, he thinks Trulia will have the upper hand. "We are 100% focused on real estate," says Mr. Flint. "They may be able to come up with something pretty good, but real estate is not like selling iPods. It is a much more complicated business."

--Ms. Vascellaro is a staff reporter in The Wall Street Journal's New York bureau.

Write to Jessica E. Vascellaro at jessica.vascellaro@wsj.com¹⁰

URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB113459528269322615.html>

Hyperlinks in this Article:

(1) http://online.wsj.com/page/2_1198.html

(2) <http://WalkJogRun.net>

(3) <http://CellReception.com/towers>

(4) <http://Local.alkemis.com>

(5) <http://HardtoRemember.org/fastfood>

(6) <http://SkiBonk.com>

(7) <http://81Nassau.com/apnews>

(8) <http://Trulia.com>

(9) <http://HousingMaps.com>

(10) <mailto:jessica.vascellaro@wsj.com>

Copyright 2007 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.