

Google enables Indians to build maps of their villages, cities

For a vast country which lacks adequately detailed maps for many of its areas, India is now finding an unexpected solution in the form of the Google Map Maker.

Google recently extended its 'map maker' service to India and has, within three weeks of its launch, drawn quite some attention to it in cyberspace.

Supporters of the project started sending messages out via the net, urging friends and colleagues to create their own detailed maps -- by adding details of features in the villages or urban areas where they live.

Google Map Maker is a new service from the Mountain View, California-based Internet search giant. It is an attempt to expand the service currently offered by Google Maps.

In countries where mapping data is hard to come by, Google Maps is being opened up to a collaborative community effort.

This project's goal is to obtain high-quality mapping data to be published and used on the existing Google Maps service.

'Mark your favourite spots in your city or hometown. Add features such as roads, parks, and buildings for unmapped rural areas. Tag small businesses and help users find them. Collaborate with others to map neighbourhoods that interest you,' says Google, urging participation in its India collaboration mapping project.

Located at maps.google.com/help/mapmaker/india/ the project was conceived and developed by Google's Indian engineering team.

One needs to sign into a free Google email account, and zoom in to the area you want to map. You can add features, names of the place, and save it. The map changes and additions are later edited by those trusted, to make sure that entries have a higher level of accuracy.

Once you 'add a neighbourhood', showing your interest in the area, you can be kept informed with changes made by others in that area of the map.

'Map your area of the world, right from your desktop,' Google urges Indian users in a promotional video on their product.

'Mark the well-loved family-run store where you grew up. Highlight hidden gems where you live. Tag popular hangouts where you went to school,' says Google.

Its logic is to urge wider community participation, a strategy that usually works in an online world where thousands participate, and each one of 'the crowd' contributes a small piece of information.

Google Map Maker was launched in India in end-August 2008.

Commented ContentSutra.com, an Indian digital news monitor: 'Considering the success of

Wiki-Mapia in India, it isn't surprising Map Maker was a product developed by Google's Indian engineering team.'

In late 2006, news reports said [Mumbai](#) had become the most-mapped city on the planet, via the Wikimapia volunteer-driven network.

In fact, among the Top 20 'most described cities' in the Wikimapia world are Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Mangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Thiruvananthapuram, Mormugao (Goa), Visakhapatnam and Indore.

Critics of Google Map Maker, such as the collaboratively-crafted Wikipedia, however have raised issues about the fact that unlike OpenStreetMap, which provides its map data under a sharable Creative Commons license, any maps created by users of Google Map Maker are the intellectual property of Google.

Some issues of security and mapping have also been raised, in a country where the official approach towards maps has a legacy which gets traced to the colonial British attitude.

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