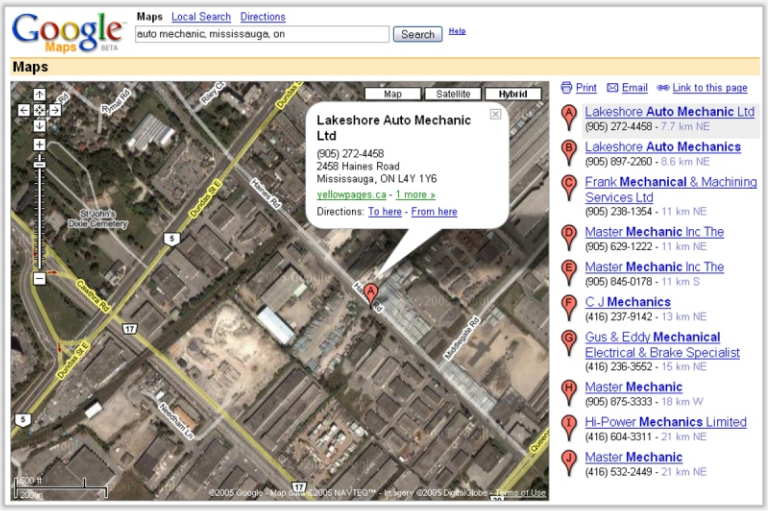
technology design analysis

Name: GOOGLE MAPS
Category: VIRTUAL

DESCRIPTION

In a February 8th entry to their online blog, Google announced that they had launched a new service: Google maps. This service, which started immediately after the announcement, soon grew to be one of the most popular online free mapping services. While other services, such as mapquest, provided similar information, none of them had such advanced metadata integration and search engine capabilities. Lets say you were looking for an auto mechanic in your area and you type: "auto mechanic, mississauga, on". Google maps would give you the location of all the mechanics in Mississauga, the quickest route to them, their phone numbers, and links to their websites (if they had them). This is something mapquest and other services could not provide. By April 2005, Google had acquired keyhole.com (satellite image mapping provider) and integrated their satellite imagery into its mapping service, so now not only could you get a standard map, you could also see what the place really looked like from a satellite image. Google's ability to amalgamate exceptional mapping/search capabilities with superb interaction design features make Google maps an excellent example of a highly successful virtual interactive technology.



A sample Google Maps search of auto mechanics in the Mississauga, on area

USABILITY

Learnablilty: One of the greatest qualities of Google maps is its learnability. If you have ever used a Google search engine, you should be able to get a handle of Google maps within seconds. The main features such as: zoom, movement, satellite mapping and hybrid mapping are clearly laid out in a very neat manner, making basic navigation and search a breeze.

Efficiency: Google maps' easy-to-navigate capabilities along with its metadata linking to their search engine make the service highly efficient in locating places and providing data on them with only a few clicks.

Utility: Google maps does exactly what the user wants or needs it to do, and in many cases al little more. It provides abundant information on the location searched and gives the user various options with the acquired information. In short: it does its job very, very well.

USER EXPERIENCE

Helpful: Google maps' capabilities make it very helpful when it comes to locating desired places. The information it provides can prove vital in a search of a certain location.

Satisfying: Knowing where exactly a certain location is and being the ability to see what it actually looks like can be quiet satisfying and may provide for a much relaxed/stress free commute.

Entertaining: Besides being a very helpful mapping tool, Google maps can also be lots of fun. People can look-up places where they reside, places they have visited, and even form online communities that do sightseeing ventures via Google maps (www.googlesightseeing.com).

EVALUATION

In a very short time Google maps has become the ultimate free mapping service. Factors that helped it reach this status are its excellent usability characteristics (such as a quick learning curve, and high service utility and efficiency) and the overall helpful and enjoyable user experience it creates. All of these features are intertwined so well that it is truly amazing as to how much information an individual can derive from Google maps with such ease. However, Google is not stopping yet. They are quickly expanding their database where they now feature street maps of Hong Kong and the United Kingdom; and are always hard working at developing new extensions and helpful uses for this system. Google maps is an excellent example of a very effective and successful virtual interactive technology that has forever changed the way we search for people, places and things.

References:

Google Maps <http://maps.google.com/>
Wikipedia: Google Maps <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Maps>