

Google gives a virtual tour of City among the first to implement online 3D mapping

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The City of Greenville is among the first municipalities in the nation to participate in Google's Cities in 3D Program.

The electronic mapping system of the 2.3-square-mile downtown area is a positive tool for a number of reasons, according to Mark DePenning, the city's GIS administrator.

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Jacob Duel, city of Greenville

During the planning phase, the city's GIS department provided the necessary geospatial data such as high-resolution aerial imagery, terrain data and 3D building data. These features were included in the 3D buildings layer in Google Earth.

The initial launch was created from 2007 data, however, the program has a two-year update schedule, with the city's first scheduled for January 2009.

"The partnership provides our decision makers with better tools for planning by displaying current downtown real estate, street layout, and terrain without having to leave City Hall," DePenning said. "Basically, we can take a virtual tour downtown to see buildings, streets, terrain and available space while sitting at our desks. That is a big cost savings to the city's budget."

He says Cities in 3D is especially helpful to the economic development department and provides necessary, preliminary information for external companies considering development or redevelopment of property within the given radius.

Greenville

"We can easily develop a PowerPoint presentation for marketing to potential developers," added Jacob Duel of the city's economic development department. "It's a win-win situation for us (the city) and Google because other cities will view our site and decide to participate in the program. That opens the door for sharing information."

Originally developed to support the downtown master plan, it is also used as part of the review process for downtown projects. It allows developers to create models of their proposed constructions and view them among downtown projects.

In viewing a proposed project in this manner, developers are better able to gain an understanding of how a building would fit into the existing landscape.

"The release of the 3D model to the public complements a variety of Web-based images of Greenville that are currently available to the public on the Internet, including satellite, bird's eye and even street-level views," DePenning said. "There are long-term benefits that did not cost the city a penny."


As the program becomes more prominent in the marketplace, DePenning said it can promote tourism, allowing potential convention planners to see the proximity of lodging and venues. It may also enhance public safety by pinpointing crime and high traffic areas. There is the possibility that it would assist the fire department in identifying blighted areas that are vulnerable to fire hazards.

"Providing millions of Google users with access to our model through the Cities in 3D Program is extremely beneficial to everyone," DePenning said. "Partnering with Google further promotes our positive image as an innovative city."

J. L. Needham, manager of public sec-

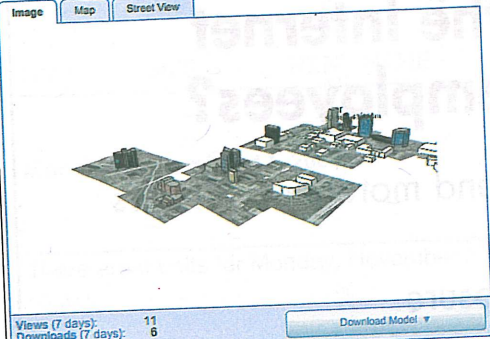
tor content partnerships at Google, said a 3D model of a city, town or neighborhood enables a local government to provide its citizens greater access to data that previously may have been confined to government agencies.

"Greenville's participation is a sign of commitment to innovation, transparency and economic development," he said.

Initially, only cities with large downtowns and business districts could be viewed in 3D on Google Earth. However, in October, Google launched the program for smaller cities and rural towns. 

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Downtown Greenville SC



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A 3D Model of many of Downtown Greenville, SC's high-rise buildings, using the new texture feature from Google Earth Beta 4. Please note, however, that this model is far from complete, and is probably not highly accurate. Also, it includes two buildings ("Pinnacle" and "Comerston") which are not yet built.

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Above is an example of Google's virtual tour of Greenville. (Image/Google)