

Get an eyeful with Google Maps 'Street View'

For a virtual tour of the world, nothing beats Google Earth.

We discussed it back in April 2006 and it remains a free download from Google.com. Over the years Google Earth has improved with better resolution and cooler zoom in/out options.

If I am driving around without my TomTom Go GPS connected I use the Maps application on my iPhone for quick directions. While at home, work, or a cli-



John Deans

ent site I hop over to Maps.Google.com for directions and mapping functions.

Over the past couple of years, a new feature to Google Maps is the Google Street View which has been both beneficial to many and controversial to some.

Google Street View provides a street level 360 degree view of a specific location requested within Google Maps.

Though is does not cover every highway, street and road in

the world, Google is trying to do that as we speak. They do have the vast majority of nearly all public streets and roads in the USA with a growing amount in Japan, Australia and Europe. Google has focused on America and they have even covered Brenham.

In fact I saw their mapping vehicle just last month on Main headed west. It was manned by a couple of guys in the early 20s with a three foot pole mounted to the top of their Nissan with a ton of miles on it. They were moving quickly with a Google sticker on the driver's door.

It appeared that the two man team was composed of a driver doing the just the driving and the passenger probably running the numerous tech gear like at least one laptop, GPS, and the multi-camera array mounted atop the car. I figure the route is predetermined by Google and all they have to do it follow the GPS instructions and keep the digital cameras feeding the laptop all day long.

Odds are at the end of their day they upload the digital images to Google for further processing and integration into the Google Maps' server farm. After the new images are activate on Google Maps we can see the street level views easily.

First look up a familiar address in Brenham such as your own home or office by typing in the full address in the Search Maps window. A red pointer will show up on the map of your target address and a call out window will pop up with hopefully a thumbnail image of the Street View option.

If the Street View thumbnail image does not appear then

click on hold the yellow person figure atop the vertical zoom bar to the left and then drag him to the street you want to view. A blue highlight will appear over the streets that have been driven and recorded for Street View by Google.

When you release the yellow man on the street and see the highlight green circle, the screen will switch with a street level view overlaid by the street name and directional vector. Move the cursor along the street and you will see a white circle that will enable you to jump to the position.

Next you can put the cursor on the house or building and a white rectangle will appear enabling you to be moved to that horizontal view. In other words, if I see a house down the street I want to be standing in front of all I have to do is put that cursor directed white rectangle on that house and poof — I am instantly standing in front of that house and viewing it.

I have been heavily using this Google Street View capability within Google Maps for over a year now scouting for possible rent homes for our company Brenham Home Rental. When I see a new listing on TXLS.com, that we talked about a couple of weeks ago, I can do my first drive-by viewing without ever leaving my chair at home.

If the prospective property looks like a dump or the neighborhood is a bit too rough then I do not need to even waste my time or fuel driving over there.

We were even able to preview our bed and breakfast locations in Alaska via Google Street View before we made reservations. This was massively help-

ful since glossy brochures and slick websites can be quite deceiving sometimes.

Though these virtual street level tours are neat and handy, Google has run into numerous problems and even lawsuits from them capturing inappropriate images or igniting privacy concerns.

In fact, Google Street View has been banned in areas around the Pentagon and military bases here in the states along with countries like Greece and Switzerland completely outlawing their street level photography web content.

Other yahoos were caught in embarrassing situations like just coming out of an adult entertainment club just as the Google car with the camera going rolled down that street. Next thing their wife sees them on Google Street View in from of the local girlie club at 2 p.m. the previous month.

If you have any privacy issue with Google's Street View online content you can get them

to either delete the image or just blur out the fact, house, vehicle or even just the license plate. This is done by just clicking on the "Report A problem" link on the picture image just to the lower left.

From there it will take you to a complaint form that you can frame up to show the specific portion of the image you want altered, blurred or removed. I filled one out concerning a car in front of our rent house just to see if Google would remove it and how long it would take. In less than 36 hours that digital shot was removed.

Bottom line: For a view like you're walking down a street in Brenham or 5th Avenue in New York City, you can use Google Street View to get an eye full.

Next week's column: Computer inventory.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.