

Google Earth Business Case Support: Compiled User Responses

- C. A. Christian (IRM/BPC/eDIP) 5 July 2006, revised 10 Aug 2006, 5 Sept 2006

Department of State Users were asked to provide information on the use or potential utility of Google Earth. In many cases, users have downloaded Google Earth on personal machines and are conducting DoS business on those machines due to the lack of availability of the tool on DoS desktops.

Advanced Planning: Google Earth has been used several times to prepare materials for VIP visitors, for example, to pin point the sites where vehicles/motorcades needed to go with the visitor. It has been used to brief the involved drivers and to estimate driving times and the layout of event venues that VIPs would visit before/after official proceedings. (See 27 June, 2006 *Image of the Week*)

“This program can be extremely valuable as tool in furtherance of dignitary protection, residential security, and investigations.”

“This product could be extremely useful for determining security routes, housing locations, etc.”

“Google Earth is a tool that would be warmly welcomed at all posts specifically those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently it’s being used on ODI’s by Personal Security Details (PSD) that guard the U.S. diplomats in the high-threat areas. Having it on opennet would allow the PSDs and DS agents to easily share data. It’s no stretch to say allowing this collaboration to take place on Opennet will save lives. “

Location Familiarization: For DoS employees traveling to unfamiliar cities it has been helpful to locate key buildings, find important locations and sites of interest. Driving directions and relative location of points of interest can be determined, especially for locations without street numbers.

“Athens is extensively using GOOGLE Earth version 3.0.0762 (Build date Nov 17, 2005) in the DSS, GSO:Motorpool, Local Guard Program, CLO and several other agencies where they need to have instant access to Locations, Routes, Distances etc.”

Map and Location Information: For travelers and GPS users overseas the basemaps in the GPS are adequate for North America-purchased instruments. However coverage in the rest of the world was poor. The GPS mapping software and associated maps often do not correspond to the actual GPS coordinates. For example a user found that at the home post in Lagos, Nigeria the accurate GPS coordinates were more than five miles off the basemap, indicating map error and up to date maps were not available. Google Earth provided much more accurate map and image information.

Real Estate: Users are interested in Google Earth for location of US owned/occupied buildings, locations of other real estate of interest and proximity to hazards, flood plains, infrastructure, hospitals, schools, law enforcement and the like. Users could save time on site inspections by choosing good locations to begin with for lease through visualization in Google Earth. One GSO related that the use of Google Earth to see

areas that are mosquito prone, proximity to state police or militia, roof top vegetation and development and other attributes would have been very helpful in choosing property. Google Earth is being used to identify suitable residences for DoS employees abroad.

Crisis and Security: The Bureau of Diplomatic Security will be able to use *Google Earth Pro* to develop geographic storyboards to bolster awareness and analysis of crisis situations and support global operational security procedures. Evacuation plans, areas to avoid, and egress routes can be depicted.

Other Security: "This program ... enabled us to get good idea of a location where we subsequently conducted a search for stolen items."

Publishing Information on Crises and Disasters: Thanks to the fairly simple protocols associated with Google Earth, it is possible for agencies, users and organizations to publish important information on crises and disasters. This can be accomplished through the Google Earth Community and/or present information protected by password. The Red Cross publishes information on areas affected by disasters, locations of hospitals, Red Cross units and relief centers on Google Earth. The UN recently published information in a Wiki with links to Google Earth on the Asian Earthquake of May 2006. See:
[http://quakehelp.asiaquake.org/qh/index.php/Relief Maps](http://quakehelp.asiaquake.org/qh/index.php/Relief_Maps)

Currency of Information: Paper maps are costly to create and distribute. Some users feel it is far superior to access more current digital information on the Internet and to use Google Earth to see the physical features that cannot be seen on a map.

Visa Applicant Information: For fraud prevention in the consular section, it often would be helpful to actually see the location of the address that is used for a visa applicant's contact in the U.S., or the location of the business at which they plan to work on a work visa. Some of the addresses presented may be non-existent or located in an undeveloped part of a city, so such information could be very useful. A business purported to be large and successful but located in a residential area may be bogus. A person claiming they will work for a church may give the address for a residential garage. Such a tool could represent a time saving for such investigations, as testified by several consular officers.

It is reported that many Consular Sections around the world are purchasing stand-alone workstations to run GE on a dedicated internet line so they can research visa applications as described above. No particular version is required at this point.

Decision Making: I was able to perform better and to reach our goals thanks to this outstanding satellite mapping technology. I know for sure that as I learn GIS, I'll be able to use the true full potential of these applications not only for our Section's needs but to support other Embassy offices to have ready available information that will allow us to take decisions based on factual geographic/demographic data.

Crisis Management: The planning and publishing of escape routes, congested areas to avoid as well as details of post compounds could all be done in Google Earth with published protocols. These could be password protected as well or restricted to Open Net use.

Other User Comments:

“The business need for Google Earth seems so patently obvious that I am ironically having difficulty explaining it. “

“explaining the need for this seems like like explaining the advantage of motor vehicles over a horse-drawn cart”

Contributions came from posts such as Asuncion, Athens, Cape Town, Chengdu, Guatemala, Harare, Nigeria, Paraguay, Brussels, India, and others. Bureau contributions came from DS, OBO, CMS, IRM, M, CA, and others.