

Background

There's no stopping Google. On the 28th Oct 2011, the BBC reported that the tech giant launched 'Street View Inside' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-15493333>, which invites business owners to show off the inside of their properties on their Google Places business pages. Barely a month later, on Nov 30th 2011, Google is at it again with the release of 'Google Maps Indoors' which helps consumers navigate the inside of a building using the upgraded Google Maps for Android app: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Gy-DI_bWEIq - !

Talk about 'organizing the world's information and making it universally accessible'!

Details

Think about the last time you were at an airport, a shopping mall or retail store – how did you find your destination or product? You probably found a map or asked someone for directions, right? Well with 'Google Maps Indoors', that directory is brought to the palm of your hands, helping you determine where you are, what floor you're on, and where to go while you're inside the building.

Brian McClendon, Vice President of Engineering for Google Earth and Maps, said that "Detailed floor plans automatically appear when you're viewing the map and zoomed in on a building where indoor map data is available. The familiar "blue dot" icon indicates your location within several meters, and when you move up or down a level in a building with multiple floors, the interface will automatically update to display which floor you're on". Describing indoors as "a new frontier", Mr McClendon said that the new feature is possible "using an approach similar to that of 'My Location' for outdoor spaces, but fine-tuned".

Implications

While the service is currently only available at selected buildings in the US and Japan, and only works on Android mobile phones, it won't be long before Google rolls out the functionality in major locations around the world.

The scheme is initially for larger retailers, airports and transit stations in the US and Japan, including Mall of America, IKEA, The Home Depot, Macy's and Bloomingdale's, Daimaru, Takashimaya and Mitsukoshi location, plus Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL), Chicago O'Hare (ORD), San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Narita International (NRT), among others.

For retail advertisers, this might mean in the future they will be able to embed the exact location of their store within a shopping mall or airport and once in the store, help consumers find exactly what they're looking for quickly and easily, as well as providing specific geo-targeted promotions potentially integrated into mobile payment-models like Google Wallet. Check out the IKEA demo for more information on how it works: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTOKMsFD4d8>

Summary

Like anything Google releases, it puts the consumer at the heart of its strategy and thinking. While advertising models are still to be thought through, as the importance of mobile location based services grows, it won't be long until brands find ways to monetise what I'm sure will prove to be an extremely valuable utility. However it remains to be seen whether consumers will be comfortable with the big 'G' not only tracking their movements but now possibly their shopping habits too. Add NFC (near field communications) via Google wallet into the equation and I'm sure Google will once again trip the privacy filters.