Editable Google Maps "miss the point"

Volunteers for OpenStreetMap, the Wikipedia-like website which is mapping the world, say Google's attempt to copy their success "misses the point" – because Google retains tight control over the map.

On Monday, Google launched the 'MapMaker' website which encourages users to draw missing roads on the map themselves – just like OpenStreetMap does. But the similarity ends there, says OpenStreetMap founder Steve Coast.

"Anyone can use the data our volunteers collect," he explains. "Charities, activists, cartographers, programmers – they can all use our data in any way they like, without charge."

Examples include a street map designed for cyclists, not motorists; a free map to load onto hand-held GPS units, showing the footpaths often missing from such maps; printed maps for charity conferences; a special whitewater map for canoeists; and maps in books, on topics from the nightlife of Brighton to the riverside pubs of England. All of these imaginative uses have been made from OpenStreetMap data – at no charge.

"But if you map with Google, only Google can use your contributions," continues Steve. "Google owns all your hard work. This is just a way for them to save the money they'd otherwise pay to the map data companies."

Steve founded OpenStreetMap in 2004 out of exasperation that the Ordnance Survey, Britain's national mapping agency, charged such high fees for its map data of the UK. The project now has 40,000 volunteers worldwide who, between them, have mapped over 20 million kilometres of roads, footpaths and cycleways. They do this by tracing over aerial photos, or by using GPS sets to track their footsteps.

If your local street is missing from OpenStreetMap, the easy-to-use map editor means you can add it within five minutes. To find out more, visit *openstreetmap.org*.

Further information

www.openstreetmap.org

See *www.gravitystorm.co.uk/osm* – a worldwide cycling map – for an example of how OpenStreetMap's free data can be employed in creative and useful ways.

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Steve Coast is available for interview.

Hi-res images to accompany this release are available on request.