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Google, Mobile Phones and the Election

Election season is upon us, and technology is making it much easier to stay informed.

By Brad King

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For years, election information has been difficult to find. Sure, you could sit back and wait for your local newspaper to pass along endorsements, or wait for the League of Women Voters to pass out their leaflets at polling stations.

But for the most part, people have increasingly received their information directly from the political parties.

New uses for existing technologies, though, are making it much easier to build an informed electorate.

Google announced that it would overlay information for the Federal Elections Commission and Open Secrets onto its Google Earth satellite maps, giving citizens the opportunity to easily track what is happening—and more important, what candidates stand for—during the upcoming election season.



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“People can easily learn a whole lot about the candidates in their particular area just by browsing this layer on Google Earth,” said John Hanke, director of Google Earth and Maps.

This is the first time Google has created an overlay of election-related links on Google Earth, and the company hasn’t decided whether it will do this for every major election in the future, Hanke said.

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into a cash cow that gives people real-world information on locations spanning the entire globe.

“There are several tens of billions of dollars in revenue available for local advertisement,” (Google Inc.’s Michael) Jones said. “I will be really proud to see more advertisement on Google Maps and Google Earth. Wouldn’t it be great if you could look up locations of hotels, and also get a list of top fiverated ones?”

But it’s not just mapping software that has the potential to connect the electorate. In Britain, civic groups are working with mobile-phone providers to make it easier for users—particularly the younger demographics—to connect politically. The groups have set up “text chats” with Prime Minister Tony Blair and are working on outreach programs that would allow groups to contact large numbers of mobile users in a short period of time. **T**

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