# LOOKING THROUGH THE STREETS

Google's Street View and Microsoft's Streetside have garnered great fanfare among shoppers and businesses alike with their 3D views of streets. Comparing and contrasting them, Kevin MacDonald takes a view of both sides of the street

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A few years ago, Google dispatched a battalion of cars fitted with GPS, cameras and Wi-Fi receivers to drive and digitise the streets we shop, live and walk. The result was Street View, which Google released to much fanfare in May 2007, accessible on both desktop and mobile. It's been a boon for street surfers, real estate agents etc but an annoyance to privacy advocates.

Microsoft rolled out a similar product called Streetside a year earlier, but its comic strip style of presentation couldn't compare with Street View's 3D immersive experience. When Streetside was redesigned for Silverlight in 2009, it reached visual parity with Google Street View.

## Technology

Google Street View uses Flash for visualisation. Mobile smartphones and notepads generally lack Flash, so Google revised Street View to run on HTML too. Oddly, Street View on Safari/OS X and Chrome/Linux use HTML, whereas all other desktop OS/browser platforms I tested use Flash.

As mentioned, Streetside works with Silverlight, which was originally a competitor to Flash. But last fall, Microsoft repositioned Silverlight as a Nokia/Windows Phone solution. So we can expect to see Streetside in a Nokia smartphone some day.

## Coverage

Street View has the best international coverage. Moreover, Google supplements Street View with still photos from Panoramio, to provide some coverage in countries that don't permit Google's cars to enter.

In comparison, Microsoft Streetside coverage is limited to a few dozen urban areas in the United States plus Vancouver, Canada. Streetside coverage continues to expand, with a priority on business districts over residential streets. You can help improve Streetside coverage by installing Microsoft's amazing Photosynth iPhone application, which lets you create your own panoramic images and share through Streetside.

## Privacy

As for privacy, Google might have jumped over the "creepy line" that separates social norms from invasion of individual privacy. That Google's digitising process was secretly harvesting data from unsecured wireless networks in homes and businesses hurt any claims of innocence. And a few weeks ago, right in the middle of Google I/O, their annual developer lovefest, Google threatened to pull Street View images for all of Switzerland, unless the Swiss Supreme Court overturned a ruling that requires Google to respect Swiss privacy laws.

These altercations haven't gone unnoticed by Microsoft. Just look at their Streetside FAQ – 13 of its 18 entries relate to matters of privacy. Streetside even claims they will "take the necessary steps to ensure filming locations and dates are communicated publicly."

## Value to you

Can Streetside and Street View help businesses, or are they just a novelty? Let's look at the store locator map application. WIth Street View and Streetside, this map provides extra street-level context that can help entice a customer to find their way into your store. Expect local business associations in northern latitudes to petition Google for another visit in summer, when flowers are in bloom, and everything looks nice.

Google and Microsoft will continue to deploy their fleets of trikes, cars and apps to expand, refine and improve their coverage of public spaces, with Google unfortunately pulling behind it the sizeable security apparatus of many governments. But for you, now is the time to consider adding some more streets to your consumer maps.