

MAPPING YOUR BUSINESS

A PICTURE TELLS A THOUSAND WORDS

Mapping from the past

Most retail or service franchisors seek to have some mapping to understand their distribution network, either from a store perspective or for territory planning and analysis. Over the years mapping has evolved from a printed wall map (originally from UBD or Melways), with black text markings or coloured pins, to more sophisticated computerised mapping.

The digital-age version is shown below as a large-format wall map (modern continuous printers mean the only size limitations are the dimensions of your wall). The formatting can be manipulated to suit the purpose, the boundary lines are very clear, it can be reprinted easily, and the underlying boundary files can be used to extract population and other demographic data. However, the map itself still has limitations because it is a static image.

Cutting edge mapping options

Dame Edna Everage would say, 'Show them colour and movement', and this can now be



Peter and Cinzia Gandolfo in front of a large format map

done in a reasonably cost-effective manner through two new mapping formats, both of which plug into existing free software.

1. USING GOOGLE EARTH

The first new way to improve mapping is using that fantastic free service called Google Earth. My view is why try and invent a new wheel when the one you have rolls very well anyway! Google Earth is a great way to visualise all sorts of things from the satellite level, including viewing photo images of all of Melbourne, Sydney or even Australia at the same time, down to the very low level of a particular shopping strip or territory. There is also the option for 'street view', which allows you to have a look at a particular shop front. There is some issue about the currency of the satellite photography, however even though this may be a few years old, roads and buildings do not change all that often.

Google Earth, like Excel or Word, is a program or an 'environment' in which to run information files. When you open Excel, you normally then open an Excel file, usually with the suffix .xls. In Google Earth, you can have your own specific files that open within the Google Earth program, with the suffix .kml. A .kml file may contain the location of all your stores, mapping layers of all your territories or special layers you or an expert consultant may have created. These could be showing your competitors, special demographic layers, or your customers.

One development allows you to click on any store in your network and open a bubble that may contain all of the store's relevant information. This could be the address, manager's name and contact details, floor space, rental costs and any sales data you wish to have. There is no limit to the amount or type of information you can include.

The beauty of a .kml file is that it is YOUR

file. While everyone may have free access to Google Earth, only you can open your files within it, similar to you having your own files to open in Excel.

2. USING LAYERED PDF MAPS

A pdf map is usually a fixed image showing all the features you want, similar to a photo.

However, we now have the ability to create what we call a 'layered pdf'. This is a map where you (the operator, with only Adobe on your computer) can input all your information and the result is an extremely professional mapping tool.

I best describe it like 'the old days', where someone would be doing a presentation standing in front of a flip chart. The person would then flip over some transparencies that were aligned to appear as if they had added the next section they wanted to show you. It is also similar to Powerpoint, where you follow one slide by the next and it appears you have just added some specific points to the previous slide.

A map you see may have 20 to 50 layers on it. When you see a hardcopy, or a normal pdf, these layers have all been locked together. The layered pdf allows the user to unlock these. A key (not unlike the folder control in Windows Explorer) sits on the side, allowing you to turn on and off the various layers as you choose.

In creating layered pdfs for clients, we find it is best to start the mapping with minimal details showing, and then let the client turn on and off the features they wish to see. A typical scenario may be the Network Development Manager presenting to the CEO, and she wants to look at a particular market and show:

- the location of our sites (shown as stars and clovers in the map shown)?

