

Introduction

Google Earth and Flash Earth are both free globe-imagining programs that are easy for anyone to use. Google Earth is a free download offered by Google and Flash Earth is a free online website that provides maps from Bing Maps and Yahoo! Maps. There is a wide range of people who use these programs. Some of these groups include hunters, hikers and people bored looking to find funny images. Each of these programs offers different features. Google Earth is a more commonly used program and I was looking to find a comparable program that does not need to be downloaded. This white paper discusses the differences between Google Earth (GE) and Flash Earth (FE).

Methods

To compare GE and FE a list of commonly used tasks was created (table 1). When searching for a location a destination was typed into a search box located in the upper left corner for GE and on the left hand side for FE. Multiple locations were entered into both programs to see how accurate the results were. The directions feature was tested in a similar way. A starting point and a destination were entered into the boxes as a location search. A place mark was placed in GE by clicking the yellow thumbtack on the toolbar (located at the top of the screen). To mark a place in FE you either right click on the screen or use the side menu (located on the left side of the screen) and select permanent link. The zoom feature was tested by using the scroll wheel of a mouse (the laptop equivalent), zoom slide bar, and double clicking in GE. FE was tested by using the scroll wheel of a mouse (the laptop equivalent) and zoom slide bar. Actual photos of location were found by choosing random spots and clicking on a photo icon. All tasks were completed using a Toshiba laptop.

Task
Search for city/town search -Vague searches
Directions to a place
Place marks
Zoom features
Actual Photos of Location

Table 1- A list of tasks that was performed using both programs

Results

When searching for a location both programs were able to find said location. GE was able to find locations with a vague reference (e.g. Sea-Tac). Whereas running the same search in FE yielded no results until additional information was added (e.g. Sea-Tac airport). In FE, you cannot search for a location when in full screen mode.

Only GE was able to give you turn-by-turn directions from any given location to any other location. FE does provide labeled roads to make your own directions.

Another feature that GE has that FE does not have is place markers. In GE, to it is very easy to use a place marker. You are able to name place markers and add a description. To re-access a place marker you can either use the sidebar or look for the thumbtack that marks your spot. FE allows you to add a permanent link to a specific location.

Both GE and FE have outstanding zoom features and clarity when zoomed in. GE allows you to use a zoom slider, mouse wheel or double click on an area to zoom into a location. GE also lets you see a street view as if you were standing in that location. Depending on the town you are (i.e. larger cities) looking at there are even 3D buildings at the street view. In GE, you zoom in where your mouse pointer is unless you use the slider then you zoom into the center of the screen. As you zoom in you can change the perspective of the screen. The image can be rotated 360°. FE allows you to use the mouse wheel or a slider to zoom into a location. In FE, you zoom into the center of the screen where the cross hairs are located. When you double click in FE, that location is then centered.

GE provides actual pictures of various locations that users upload. To access pictures through GE you click on a photo icon that is present on the map. Depending on how zoomed in/out you are there will be different pictures available. FE does not provide any actual pictures of locations.

Recommendations

After using both programs, I would recommend them both. Before I would recommend a program I would get some insight the reason they are wanting to use globe imagine software. If a person only wants to do basic things or do not want to download a program, I would recommend FE. FE is an easy to use website that allows someone to look at any given area and allows a person to get vague directions to an area. The lack of more complex features (e.g. actual photos, distance, 3D view, etc.) is the downfall of FE. For that reason, GE is by far the better program of the two. Since GE is a free download, I would recommend anyone that is interested in hunting, fishing, backpacking, etc. to download GE on their computer. There are countless features that GE has that can make planning your next trip very simple before getting more detailed maps. All the basic features that most people would use regularly are very simple to use and conveniently located.