

PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

Map Me This

Google and Nokia have both made free turn-by-turn navigation applications on mobile devices. Are they any good? **KUSHAN MITRA**

Maps are not perfect: there are enough people getting lost thanks to their Global Positioning System (GPS) navigation devices. Having said that, "free" turn-by-turn navigation is useful to have on your mobile device. Nokia's Ovi Maps works on all Symbian Series 60 (E Series, N Series and a few others) devices. The free service, however, is only available on handsets that are

GPS-enabled. Google Maps, which is a free download, works on virtually every smartphone. But unlike Ovi Maps, which is stored in your device memory, Google Maps connects to a network to download maps as you move. The "turn-by-turn" navigation service works only on devices running Google's Android in India, though Google Maps' direction service works on multiple platforms.

Using the service is a breeze on both platforms. You enter a start-point and an end-point. Finding an exact residential address might be an issue on Indian maps, but then you could enter a nearby landmark. So if you have to go from your office to, say, a Fortis Hospital, you can enter that as your end-point. The software will throw up a list of hospitals as the likely location. You select the right one. Alternatively, if the person whose home or office you are visiting stays near a Fortis Hospital, you could plug that as the end-point and subsequently navigate manually.

You would ideally need a car-stand for your mobile and since GPS modules seem to gorge on power, a car-charging kit too. Total cost: around Rs 500, though one would recommend an unlimited data connection on your device for both services. Your mobile needs a clear line of sight to the sky to receive a GPS signal, so the dashboard or the windscreen would be the best attach-points. For the same reason, using a navigator from the backseat may not be a great idea.

Navigation is very easy inside the city. If you don't "agree" with the route, you can recalculate it with a few clicks and even program it to avoid



OVI MAPS

- Free navigation supported on select high-end Nokia devices. Basic maps available for others
- Limited number of cities
- Maps can be loaded on device
- Good user-interface and voice navigation

certain parts of the city. The problem is often outside major cities and here Ovi Maps is really poor even though it did have the slightly better interface, (particularly the "Walking" navigation tool). Google's maps, which have been worked on by an army of users using Google Map Maker, seem more thorough outside major cities but the navigation tool (we used it on an Android device) could be better.

So the short answer is that neither service is perfect, and standalone mapping companies have far better maps. But, as they say, "free" is an amazing price. There is one major downside, though. The devices the maps work on are phones and neither service has the ability to block calls when navigating. If you get a call at a complicated turn, it isn't your lucky day. ©

GOOGLE MAPS

- Supports multiple platforms—Android, Symbian, BlackBerry and iPhone
- Several Indian cities mapped
- Maps are downloaded in real time, poor mobile data connectivity can affect maps
- User interface could improve

