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MONDAY NOVEMBER 10, 2014

JUMPING THE CURB WITH BUSINESS VIEW

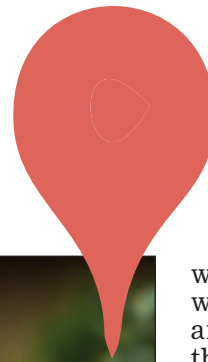


Photographer works with Google to
provide inside look at local businesses



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New technology offered in Sierra Vista area

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For those who are new in town, Google Maps can be a lifesaver.

Gone are the days when maps were kept in the glove-box of your car and the role of passenger involved the responsibility of navigation. Forget knowing where the sun sets to chart your westward course.

Today's lost souls rely on the convenience of a smartphone and animated voice instructions that announce when and where to turn on the route to a pinpoint location.

It's even better navigating from a desktop computer. After entering the address, the search engine provides a detailed image that offers a variety of maps, including satellite imagery or terrestrial information.

If that's not enough, Google displays a yellow stickman figure and with the click of a mouse the computer screen is filled with a "street view." Moving the stickman provides a 360-degree view of the neighborhood, just as it would appear from a car window.

Interested in renting a new place to live in Hereford? Type in the address, then zoom in on the map, click on the stickman and suddenly your computer screen is filled with a picture of the prospective living quarters.

Looking for something to add to the garden? Type in "Mountain View Koi Fish Nursery" and seconds later the stickman provides a streetview image of what this Sierra Vista area business looks like from a car windshield.

But what if you wanted to "jump the curb?" What



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Google Street View photographer René Meeh shoots pictures at Mountain View Koi Fish-Nursery Friday in Sierra Vista.

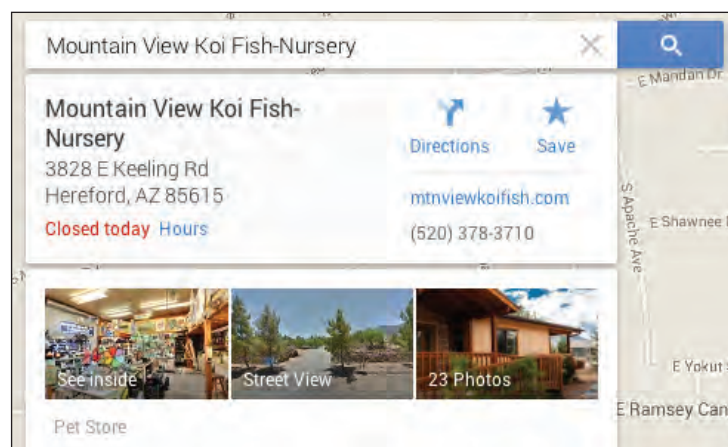
if Google could move the stickman from behind the windshield to inside the actual business?

Meet Rene Meeh, a relative newcomer to the region who is working with Google on providing business views that offer an entirely new angle to map reading.

Several local firms have worked with Meeh and his local Google Business View franchise to create 360-degree imagery that allows anyone navigating a computer to experience a virtual tour of a location.

Type in Manda Le Restaurant and Google provides choices for directions to the address, or to "see inside," with photographs composed by Meeh.

"I take four sets of three pictures to create HDR (high-definition resolution)," Meeh



said. "Depending on what the customer wants, it's not usual to take pictures from 50 or 60 different spots."

Like Street View from the outside, Meeh's pictures allow computer navigators to see a location and make it familiar before they arrive.

His work at Mountain View

Koi Fish Nursery captures the store and the grounds, with pictures of a wide variety of attractive plants, fish ponds and landscaping ideas. Using the on-screen navigation tools, users can "walk" through the property and get an idea of what's for sale.

"We have to let people know

we're here," said Lisa Ogren, who with her husband Curt are the longtime owners of the business. "We're kind of hidden up here, so this was a way to let people see where we are and what we offer."

Meeh secured the Sierra Vista area after applying to Google to participate in its Business View program. He works fulltime as a computer programmer and has been taking panorama photographs for about 13 years.

"This isn't enough for a full time profession, but I enjoy it and Google invited me to go through the training, so it's turned out well," Meeh said.

Starting packages range from about \$400 to as much as a customer wants to spend, depending on the number of images that are added. The virtual tour becomes part of the customers Google+ (Plus) homepage on the web, and it comes up as an option when searching for more information on a business.

"It's a great marketing tool, because it goes beyond just the street view of a business and actually takes a customer inside the store," Meeh said.

"It creates a walk-through experience."

Other businesses in the area that have worked with Meeh include LaCasita Restaurant and The German Cafe, both of which offer extensive pictures of the interior of each eatery. Our Lady of the Sierras — A Marian Shrine, also has used the Business View service.

"The virtual tour then goes on the customer's Google+ page, and it comes up as a sidebar when doing a search using Google," Meeh said.

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