Mall of America helps visitors find their way with indoor Google Maps

MALL OF AMERICA.

About Mall of America

In 1992, Mall of America opened its doors in the Twin Cities suburb of Bloomington, Minnesota. Since then, MOA has been one of the biggest tourist destinations in the United States. MOA boasts over 520 retail stores, the United States' largest indoor amusement park, a large indoor underwater aquarium, a movie theater and more. MOA is a Midwestern entertainment hub, drawing big musical acts, celebrity book signings and fashion shows.

The four-story tourist attraction occupies 4.2 million square feet, and is set to expand by up to 5.6 million square feet. The expansion is anticipated to attract more upscale customers, adding an additional 20 million annual visitors.

• www.mallofamerica.com
• Bloomington, Minnesota, US

Mall of America aerial view

"The future of this product is where it's really going to be at .. when you look at layering data over the map data, that really excites me."
—Lis Grimm, digital brand manager, MOA

Challenge

Mall of America (MOA) is faced with the constant challenge of making its vast indoor space manageable for visitors. The 4.2 million square feet of retail and entertainment space is the reason why MOA is Minnesota's biggest tourist attraction, bringing in an estimated 42 million annual visitors. Of these annual visitors, 60% are 'local' visitors, coming from within a 150 mile radius, while the other 40% are visiting from beyond this radius, nationally and internationally. The sheer size of MOA makes it challenging for even familiar visitors to find their way around--let alone completely new visitors.

Prior to partnering with Google Maps, MOA has relied on directory kiosks, customer service agents, an information texting service, and a mobile directory application to help orient their visitors. MOA has endeavored to make indoor map information accessible to as many visitors as possible by making it available through various layers of information. However, each of these methods has shortcomings; if not due to usefulness, then by virtue of having a limited scope of accessibility.

'We are interested in providing enhanced layers of usability for guests, and guest experiences are of primary importance. With the visitor numbers and square footage we have, there are several different problems we try to solve and address for our guests--and there are different fluency levels for them."
—Lisa Grimm, digital brand manager, MOA

MOA's goal is to spread indoor map information to visitors across many levels, in order to keep them from feeling overwhelmed by the expansive space. They want visitors to spend more time enjoying their experience at MOA, rather than expending time and patience finding their way around.

Solution

Mall of America partnered with Google Maps in a goal aligned effort to map their space for indoor Google Maps--presently available via Google Maps for Android. This opportunity has also allowed MOA to capitalize on the growing population of smartphone users. As of March 2012, over 106 million people in the U.S. owned a smartphone. Google Android is the most widely used platform, with 51% of the market share; Apple iOS trails with 30%.[1] (While indoor Google Maps are currently only available on Android devices, Google's goal is to make indoor Google Maps available to as many people as possible).

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1. comScore, *comScore Reports March 2012 US Mobile Subscriber Market Share*, April, 2012.
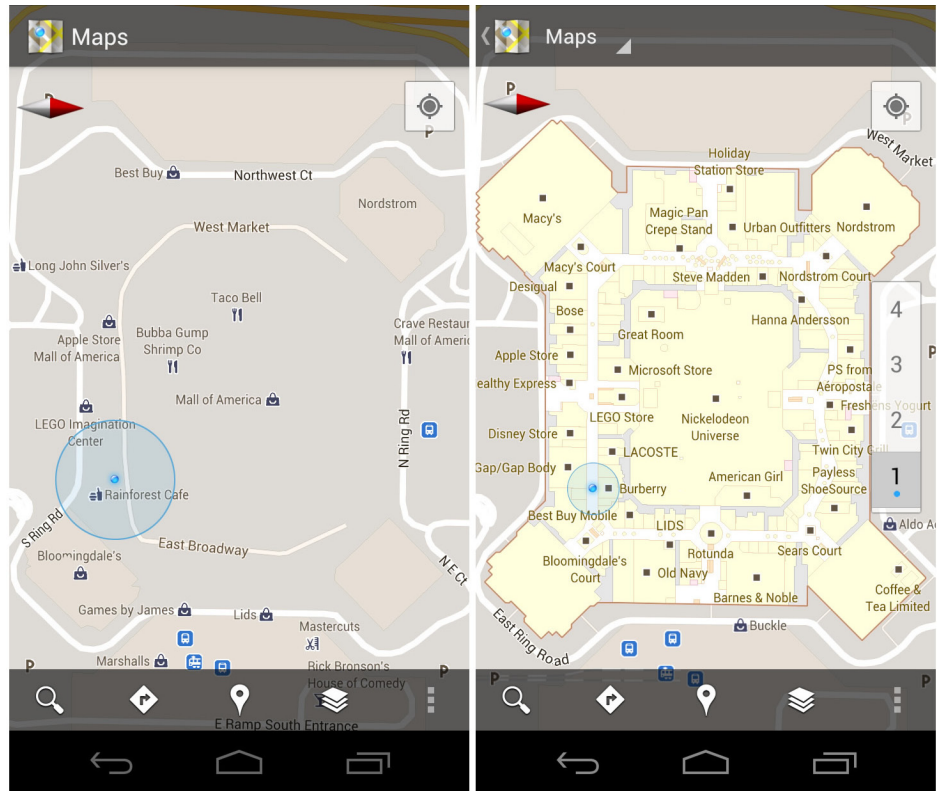
Mall of America on indoor Google Maps, before (left) and after (right) with indoor floor selector

Google Maps' visibility and usability has buttressed MOA's effort to continue to reach an increasing number of visitors. Grimm states, "The huge appeal and the way that you guys have designed and developed the product is very easy to use, that was the huge thing for us ... We wanted to provide an extra layer of experience for guests in terms of navigation."

"[Google Maps is] really known for being experts from a mapping standpoint--finding your way, and map data providing a good user experience. Partnering with you guys, in that regard, was very important to us having someone who has been around for a long time who has built a really solid outdoor product."
—Lisa Grimm, digital brand manager, MOA

Using indoor Google Maps, MOA visitors can access a labeled floor plan to easily identify different stores, departments within large retail stores, or ATMs and restrooms. Visitors can also switch between floors to see the respective layouts and get indoor walking directions. For a more complete indoor Google Map experience, visitors can opt-in to the My Location feature to turn on the 'blue dot' icon to get a live read of where they are on the map, within a few meters.

Grimm states, "With indoor Google Maps specifically, it was a great layer of convenience ... Navigating a space this big is obviously going to be a potential obstacle." MOA's partnership with Google Maps is closing the information gap between their visitors and their large indoor space.