



*Michèle Laird*

## Navigation software aims to make expat life easier

*By Michèle Laird*

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**A software programme that promises to help Anglophone newcomers settle in the Lake Geneva area is being launched by French expat Bernard Duclos. His unusually named computer tool, Fairy's Map, identifies where the services and places most likely to be useful to relocated families can be found. With an emphasis on health, education, shopping and recreation, it not only provides selected addresses, it also gives instructions in English on how to get to them.**

When he first arrived in Switzerland, the founder and director of VoXiS, Bernard Duclos, discovered the problem that most expats face when they move to unknown territory: where to turn to obtain relevant information.

After working for various multinational companies, including Cisco and Microsoft, he realized that most expats have the additional disadvantage of not speaking French.

After an experience several years ago drove home the need for a service to aid newcomers, Duclos set about developing a computer software programme in English that aims to fill the gap.

The resident of Gland (Vaud) recalled receiving a distressed call on a Saturday evening from a Sheik lost in the industrial section of Nyon, where the streets appeared to have no name. The visitor had no way of recognizing his destination and could not ask for directions in French. "I decided it was time to come up with a programme that functions like a GPS (Global Positioning System) combined with a super concierge service," Duclos told Swisster.

The result is Fairy's Map, a programme with references for more than 1,000 points of interest for expats in Vaud, Valais and Geneva, as well as in neighbouring France.

Key addresses are organized into 40 categories that appear as coloured symbols on computer-generated maps. Information can be accessed by searching a specific category or by selecting a given radius on the map to discover what services are available in a particular vicinity.

Duclos's user-friendly software, based on Microsoft's MapPoint, allows maps and aerial photographs to be printed out beforehand and text messages to be sent to mobiles so that addresses can be shown to passers-by.

But the real purpose of his "mashup" (the use of an existing technology to produce a new service) is to pre-identify useful resources for a given clientele. Google is of little use, Duclos said, if what you are looking for is referenced under a local language that you don't speak. For instance, try looking for playgrounds.

As for satellite navigation systems, they are only useful once you know where to go and have

the complete address, including the right spelling. " Place Calvin" in Geneva, Duclos indicated, cannot be found unless it is entered " Place Jean Calvin".

VoXiS's first navigation software, the Smart Set Map, was developed for upscale travellers to the region. It was so successful in identifying the beauty clinics, luxury jewellers, golf courses and private jet companies that are the everyday fare of visiting VIP's that Duclos was encouraged to extend the programme to expats.

The Fairy's Map has is being launched as a one-stop solution for people who have just arrived in the area or who do not speak French. It provides addresses that are directly relevant to new residents, such as translation agencies, cantonal or communal services, drycleaners, big-and-tall clothing shops, international schools and English-speaking doctors, to name just a few. Updates will expand the lists approximately every six months.

" If your kid twists his or her ankle, the Internet won't be of much help," Duclos said. " You need an English-speaking paediatrician, with precise instructions on how to get to his practice." That is the sort of information his software provides. It will also indicate the closest toy shops for parents who want to reward well-behaved children.

But it doesn't come cheap. Individual licenses are Swiss francs 2,000 and multiple licenses are sold for 6,000 francs. The programme must be purchased from and installed by VoXiS and it cannot be downloaded from the Internet.

Duclos is nonetheless confident he will find a market for his product, mainly with companies providing services for expats and multinational companies.

Xavier Comtesse, who heads the Geneva office of the country's leading think-tank, Avenir Suisse, says he was immediately captivated by the concept and its easy-to-use design. But the business plan, in his opinion, is all wrong.

First of all, he does not understand why the mashup is based on MapPoint, which is a licensed product, rather than on Google maps, which is free.

Furthermore, he said the VoXiS programmes should be web-based and available on subscription at a competitive price.

" The product is great and will certainly be a success if it is developed further," Comtesse said. The Smart Set and Fairy's Map can be purchased from VoXiS by calling Duclos on +41 (0)22 364 0593

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