

BOULDER COUNTY BUSINESS REPORT

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Custom maps, chart images built with MyOnlineMaps subscription

By Elizabeth Gold

BOULDER - Work smarter not harder. Do more with less. Don't waste time reinventing the wheel. Time is money.

Today's business mantras inspire the working masses to streamline processes and increase output. Keeping ahead of the competition requires more than simply creating a needed product or service.

Whoever gets projects completed first has a better chance of success.

Many of today's timesaving tools that help businesses stay in the game are rooted in software and Web-based technology. With that in mind, Patrick Kelly came up with MyOnlineMaps - an online mapping service for people who were doing similar tasks as he was.

As a higher-education researcher, Kelly was spending more time than he wanted waiting for files to load so he could complete his job. Creating data-driven maps for presentations and documents requires visits to numerous Web sites - each with a built-in wait for loading.

"As a researcher and statistician, I've generated a lot of state and county maps," he said. "There weren't any map packages out there that were simple to use as well as inexpensive."

In search of a way to streamline his work, in a way that fit his needs, Kelly approached Jonathan Weindruch, a Web-strategy consultant, with the idea of creating Web-based mapping software.

On July 11 the partners launched MyOnlineMaps at www.myonlinemaps.com.

The Internet-based software application generates custom map and chart images that can be transferred to reports and presentations in programs like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.

MyOnlineMaps provides access to the most commonly used demographic variables, according to Kelly. They include income levels, education levels, health stats and crime rates.

"Most of the information comes from public sources like the U.S. Census Bureau," Kelly said. "We're providing a major shortcut in getting that info. It can take 20 to 30 minutes to load each of those (other) files.

"People can also upload their private data sets and generate state and county maps in any state or county in the U.S."

Combining state and county maps with demographic information helps a variety of industries do their work and plan their strategies. Economic development organizations rely on information that shows education levels of area work forces and predominant industries to plan their direction.

Demographic information helps health-care organizations decide where health-care facilities are most needed and which populations are most predominant.

Legislative analysts utilize maps to geographically assess the effectiveness of state policies or potential impacts of legislation.

MyOnlineMaps is a subscription-based service, in part because it relies on online dynamic databases to provide current information.

A "Basic" subscription runs \$144 annually. It allows subscribers to generate 100 maps of any of the states and counties in the U.S. Once the maps are generated, users can revise them to fit changing requirements.

"We plan to continuously expand to include more geographic regions, including boundaries from other countries," Kelly said.

The "Plus" subscription enables subscribers to generate 300 maps. There's another level of detail available as well - the maps focus on regions as well as county and state boundaries.

The free subscription allows users to test the product by generating up to 20 maps.

"We've sold several subscriptions so far, but most people want to try the free subscription first, so we have more of those right now," Kelly said.

Weindruch and Kelly spent two years developing their product, and both continue to work in their separate fields. Kelly does research for the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in Boulder, and Weindruch is principal of Nashville, Tenn.-based Websults.

The partners self-funded the MyOnlineMaps venture. "Ninety percent of it was with sweat equity," Kelly said. "My partner is a Web developer so he developed it, and I'm a statistician so I provided the sites and information.

"The beauty of a Web product is that you don't need any warehouse space since you don't sell a physical product."

They're currently initiating a marketing program to reach customers.

Since Kelly and Weindruch have invested more time than money into the project so far, the company is making a profit already. "In terms of a real profit, we hope to make that over the next several months."

Kelly said MyOnlineMaps doesn't really have direct competition. "There's nothing out there that's this simple and inexpensive. True hardcore mappers may stick with the \$3,000 products that require two weeks of training."