



Manaton September 2008,

WHY “Map Maker Pro”?

I am often asked how the software Map Maker Pro 3.5 compares with other GIS/ Mapping software. This is my usual response:

1- No commercial interest

First of all let me state quite clearly that I have NO commercial interest or link with Map Maker Ltd. (other than that I have paid for my licence and yes, I do earn a living and am able to pay of my mortgage using the software).

I maintain this “MM Support” web-site with a spark of idealism, as a courtesy to my clients and naturally hope to gain some new clients through it as well.

2- My background

Just so as to put some perspective to this epistle:

I am a Dutch Cartographer working and living in Dartmoor in the UK. I was the founder and head of the digital cartography department of the mapping division of the Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM Aerocarto) and as Senior Project manager responsible for all foreign mapping projects. We had three aircraft taking aerial photography and produced a vast range of maps and datasets for various National mapping agencies and high –end users. These mapping projects were cross-disciplinary, incorporating Land Surveys, GPS surveys, Photogrammetry, Cartographic and GIS techniques.

I now trade as 'Latitude Cartography Ltd.' and produce maps and set up mapping systems for (e.g.) Local Authorities, Forestry firms & Estates and present courses in digital mapping and the use of aerialphotography.

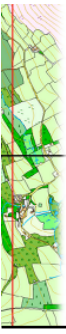
In my KLM days I had to investigate a lot of ‘mapping’ software. All the big names: Microstation, MapInfo, ArcInfo, ArcView etc. All of them start with a single license of around \$2700, and than annual licence fees on top of that. And of course for an office license it is shockingly more. On top of that we found we needed all sorts of extra modules (at great expense) to deal with 3D, data manipulation and other quite common tasks in digital mapping. These packages are highly complex and some of them -I was advised- need at least a year (if not two) full time training if you want to get the most out of it.

I have managed staff and have quite a number of clients using software such as for example MapInfo & ArcInfo : they all find it good, but extremely complex and muddled software. Often they are frustrated as they can not get out of the system the maps and data they want themselves.....

When I started my firm, a friend showed me a mapping package which he had found on the net after he had bought MapInfo and followed a course and realised this was too complex for him. It was "Map Maker Pro".

I was literally bowled over by its functionality! Got into contact with the developer and since then voluntarily been “Beta-Testing” the software.

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I found it extremely user-friendly and the software offers more in this one package than most of the big boys with all their additional modules. Furthermore, it has some unique tools, absolutely essential in digital mapping, which the others don't even have.....

And the good news is that it is free. Or ,if you want the professional version (which has got even more sensible functionality), it will only cost you \$400 and an office licence \$1600.

Had I known Map Maker before, KLM would now be using it and I would have recommended it to all our international clients.

I am deliberately trying to avoid techno-jargon in this epistle do contact me if you would like to hear some precise examples and technical explanations. I know this sounds all very much like 'sales talk', but I still like to think I am an independent, objective user, an enthusiastic cartographer, a map maker.

I don't care where you spend your money. I can only explain what my findings are and why I can strongly recommend Map Maker Pro.

3- Made in Scotland

I do have good contact with the developers. They used to work in the development world and realised these folk needed maps and good tools to make maps. They are idealists and produced several software modules to help them in their work, eventually wrapping it up in the software now called 'Map Maker Pro', now produced and developed on a remote Scottish peninsula. That is why it is so inexpensive, user-friendly and so multifunctional. They aim the software at 'professionals' (in its broadest sense) and thus the interface has to be user-friendly.

4- Disclaimer

The developers don't (or hardly) advertise, nor do they proclaim or boast about the merits of this software. They just develop it and maintain it. As said, they have a specific target audience (developing world) in mind, and that's it.

The software is particularly developed to MAKE maps as opposed to typical GIS functionality to analysing data or managing (bulk) data. However, as mentioned above, the software is in actual fact so good that it (I think) allows you to do about 95% of what all other software can do in this "GEO" mapping" world. It is professionals like myself who get all wired up about its potential and end up 'spreading the word' and use and push the functionality of MM further than that it was designed for in the first place. But still, the software delivers.

5- The manual

You will find the manual to be most useful.

However, it is like a car manual. It will tell you where the spare wheel is and how to change a fuse or tune the engine, it will only give you limited insights in how to MAKE maps.... Don't blame it on the manual.

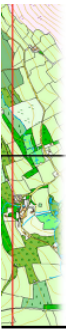
Although the software is very user friendly: you will find that 'Digital Mapping' and 'GIS' are complex issues, by their very nature.

Having said that: most folk find their way into the software without any help and now use Map Maker like any other normal 'desktop tool'.

6- Users

I have implemented this software now as a GIS in UK's leading Forestry firm (Fountains) and have implemented it as a very efficient and cost effective estate management tool at several estates here in the UK. Another nationwide consultancy firm (semi-governmental) also had found their way to MM and I have been training regional staff teams.

All of these users have had plenty of budget and R&D and eventually settled for Map Maker Pro..... Please contact me directly should you wish to receive some specific references.



Map Maker has got a large world-wide clientele and has about 1000 downloads per month of the free GRATIS version.

Map Maker is used a lot in the development world. Here in the western world, bigger organisations tended to shy away from Map Maker since it is a relatively unknown package. With no apparent 24x7 support team -based in India-, and with such a small purchase fee, they simply dare not break the mould and thus stick to their big & expensive technology.

Fair enough: the big well known software packages might be able to link on-line, wireless, all utility services of a city so that anyone has got access to all up-to-date details of the city's underground infrastructure: mind bogglingly good and impressive.

National Mapping agencies might wish to keep records of every object in the map: when it was drawn, when it was changed and what the old line looked like in 1975.

OK: these giants might be able to give the CIA real-time satellite images allowing them to pin-point moving trucks transporting WMD. But what do they offer us, mortals, in need of similar technology except not on such a humongous scale (& associated price tag)....?

But then: I have made some big maps, dealing with huge databases, and MM allowed me to do it. Perhaps not in record time, but fast enough to be economically viable and not to get frustrated by it.....

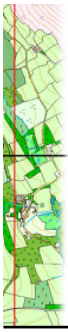
I find (here in the UK) that even the bigger organisations are slowly finding their way to Map Maker. I hear more and more, of 'mortals' who are out of favour with their corporate GIS chap -because the poor soul is usually overloaded with work- and thus are not being served. They often use 'GRATIS' (or purchase 'Pro' , slipping it in without lengthy budgetary bureaucratic procedures, along with their weekly order of printer ink & paperclips), so that they at least can get on with their work. And once done, convert the data to feed the corporate database and keep the organisation happy.....

I have heard from clients who had spent literally thousands on ArcInfo, and then ended up buying Map Maker only because of its good import & export functionality (only to discover that MM would have been a better tool for them all along

7- Functionality

Map Maker Pro is more than just a 'map makers tool'. It can also be used as a proper GIS (Geographical Information System). Some examples:

- One can simplify the interface or minimize it altogether so that it can be used as a "viewer", or "visitors information system"
- Map Maker deals very efficiently with GPS input.
- Serving a world wide audience, it deals well with map projections and allows you to alter the host of given standards if need be.
- Hidden away in one of the menus you will find very good 3D functionality. This is a very useful and efficient tool for analysing and presenting information in 3D. It even allows you to make 'flythroughs'. The last professional 3D analysis module I had a look at which had similar (but less) functionality was just over \$5000.....
- Map Maker can read -amongst others- DXF, MapInfo and ArcInfo data, and can import it into its native format if you need to amend and modify it. Similarly it can convert its native files to most commonly known GIS formats.
- Unlike other software MM is not a 'black box' in which things happen. It is extremely open and transparent and thus you are in full control of what is happening to your databases & maps.
- It links in well with MS Word, Excel and Access. You either use your databases in these packages or work with the data in dbf format within them MM environment.
- Map Maker can produce high quality map output as well, to be printed on your desktop printer or by you



local offset printer. It can print to 'raster' so that you can slot these images into your word processor document and reports or publish it on the web.

On top of all this: Map Maker has got some very efficient novel tools, essential to producing proper, sound digital maps and GIS data. Tools that are not available in any other package.

8- Bugs & Glitches

Software is complex stuff. I learned the hard way how to avoid crashing my PC when using Photoshop and Word. I can have Excel send automated e-mail "error reports" with functionality that does not work. AutoCad has got 'buttons' that when you press them, nothing happens. And let's face it: how often do you have to reboot your PC in your normal 'office work'?

A while ago Microsoft had to issue some 'security' patches whilst launching their latest security software!

Modern society has abandoned its trust in God, and has chosen to put its trust in 'technology' instead. So we don't like it if that fails. It is our holy cow, it should not let us down. We'd rather blame an airplane crash on 'human error' than on a leaking fuel valve. What else can we cling to?

So we expect absolute perfection of technology and software. But unlike the first, this will never be the case. And so it will be with Map Maker.

Map Maker is constantly being updated and improved and 'slips of the pen' do happen. Minor mishaps like that come and go. Because Map Maker is such a transparent system and links in well with other Office applications, it also depends on a good general performance of your PC.

8 out of the 10 emergency calls I get from clients deal with the complexity of digital mapping in general (not Map Maker 'problems'). 9 out of the 10 "bug" reports I get from clients can usually be boiled down to an error in their PC's configuration or peculiar MS-Windows settings..

But on the whole, all in all: I never get such panic calls. Working with it daily. There are no major glitches that I know of. There are some very minor ones but I know the developer periodically sees to such minor issues.

I find MM very stable.

9- Short comings

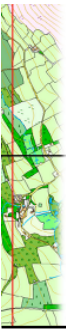
As a professional Cartographer and GIS consultant, of course I know of some shortcomings. There are some menu structures which perhaps could be improved or altered. With some specific functionality, Map Maker might perhaps not be the fastest tool around, just remember that it was designed to operate on flimsy old PC's. However, let me stress again: I as a professional, commercially operating cartographer, using a normal medium spec'ed, off the shelf PC, find Map Maker fast enough NOT to get irritated.

A few operations can be done more eloquently in other packages, whereas in MM it might need a two staged approach. (But on the up side, there are usually two or three ways of doing things in MM.)

Yes, I as a high end user can think of a (short-ish) list of functionality which would be interesting to have (functionality which I can find in very specialised, high-end, and thus very expensive software). But for 98% of all 'map makers' I'd say that Map Maker is good enough as it is.

10- Unique features

Map Maker has got some very unique functionality, which, to date can not be found in any other software. This functionality could save big mapping companies (that I used to work for) a lot of time and would increase the quality of their datasets: and that also counts for you.



In fact: Map Maker can put the world's leading National Mapping Agency (so they claim): the UK's "Ordnance Survey", to shame.

As much as I respect the impressive data range the OS maintains and the wonderful maps they have produced in the past before they became a commercial company, the Ordnance Survey is now slipping into dangerous waters. They are proudly rolling out their latest digital map product (the Mastermap). This deals with 100% polygon cover of the landscape. Yet in the small print they mention that 5% errors (overlapping polygons) can be found in it. And indeed the highest level I have come across was 4%. Errors of which they ought to be ashamed. These errors are unnecessarily and unacceptable in a national high-end dataset on which grants are awarded and on which taxes are based.

Map Maker Pro has got the tools to trace these and amend these.

11- All rounder

I use three different image processing applications because none of them have got all the functionality that I regularly use. It is often the same with GIS and mapping software. You often need additional software to push your data into a next stage or be able to achieve a particular process.

I use Map Maker as my sole tool, that is quite something.

I have recently visited a "GIS/GEO" trade show. And naturally the latest and the best was on show. Of all that was produced, of all the software shown, I realised that I could match an extraordinarily large proportion of all those marvels, using Map Maker Pro. OK some had special menus eloquent wizards and dedicated buttons, but I could produce about the same using MM as my sole tool.

Remember "Word Perfect"? It was a very intuitive and a brilliant word processor. Now thanks to Windows the world can talk to each other and we all have this wealth of software available: no complaints. But big money was wheeled in and MS Word rules the waves along with "Auto-formatting" and endless other functionality that just gets in the way. Not necessarily the best, but MSWord is dominant.

And so it is with GIS/mapping software.

Big American defence money is behind some of the current market leaders, but they are not necessarily the best.

Look at Word, Excel and Access. Word is a typewriter, but they needed more sales and thought: "hey, we can do sums as well". Then they realised that their users were typing out a lot of addresses and printing envelopes and offered them database functionality to manage their addresses.

Excel was initially designed to be a good calculator: it now can almost match the functionality of Access.

What I am saying is this: Software starts at one end, and then gradually moves into a centre field which captures the imagination of most/more clients.

So it was in the GEO software world.

CAD software (architect & engineering/design) saw the mapping clientele and extended their core thing with modules and bolt-ons to attract map makers.

Graphic design packages realised that maps also dealt with lines and fill colours, so they added on some modules so they could deal with projections and grid-reference systems.

Data crunchers, to analyse vast (GEO)datasets, realised they needed to have some out-put functionality so moved toward the centre, to be able to actually make maps as well.

Around all of these one can find "specialised" software that orbits around the main package, to be an aid in specific tasks.

Map Maker Pro started in that centre, afresh, with targeted and lean functionality. (You need a CD full of data to install the big boys: MM comes in a downloadable zip file only 2.7Mb big. That is just by clever



programming, for the big boys have become lazy. In Map Maker you can convert an 18Mb digital map from AutoCad –DXF, into a 1 Mb MM file. That is the difference in approach.

Map Maker is in the centre of all these big packages, designed to be flexible and multifunctional. And as it developed that centre circle expanded and now can do, well, 80%, 90%? of what all the pillars of the GEO society and their orbitals can do.

Map Maker does not lose focus either. Over time it has had some good functionality but taken it out later again for some of the 'orbital' software could do a better job.

Could MM be the “Linux” of the GEO world?

12- Support

The 24x7 support line of the big boys, well, let's face it, you end up browsing through endless -useful- help web-site pages or you get fully automated E-mail responses, which all in all just about miss the point of what is troubling you.

With Map Maker you will find that if you call them, or E-mail them, you will often actually talk to the developer himself. Although serving a world wide clientele, they get surprisingly few E-mails and telephone requests. This also proves the point that the software delivers.....

I hope , my “Map Maker Support Page” will also be of help for Map Maker users, and if you were to visit the “Forum” page you will observe that the developers regularly login and monitors the forums, dealing with the issues where required.

On my web-site, on the 'MM-Support' page you will find -I think- some useful information that might help a bit in coming to terms with the basics of Map Maker and complexities of Digital Mapping in general.

These aids might give you a good starting point (although your work might be completely different.....).

For some 'map' examples of real work: please visit my web-site: www.latitudecartography.co.uk .

Concluding

You can spend much more money, and look long and hard for other software, as an experienced and professional Cartographer & GIS consultant, take my word for it:

Map Maker is designed for professionals who need to make and work with digital maps. It has got a stunning functionality in map making and GIS, it is most user friendly, it is inexpensive and does probably more than you will ever need.

Map Maker Pro delivers.

Kind regards,

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