Google Inc. (GOOG) unveiled its mapping application for Apple Inc. (AAPL)'s iPhone, iPad and other iOS devices, restoring a popular tool that the smartphone maker replaced with its own in September. The free Google Maps app is available in more than 40 countries and 29 languages, Google said in a blog posting today. Google was widely expected to introduce its own app after the new version of Apple's iOS mobile software removed the built-in software.

The original app, powered by Google, was an essential feature since the iPhone's debut in 2007. Critics faulted Apple's new application for unreliable landmark searches, routes that get users lost and lack of public transit directions, prompting Chief Executive Officer Tim Cook to issue a rare apology to consumers.

"People around the world have been asking for Google Maps on iPhone," the company said in the blog post. "Starting today, we're pleased to announce that Google Maps is here."

Cupertino, California-based Apple added new features such as turn-by-turn navigation and fly-over views of landscapes into its program. IOS software runs iPhones and iPads, which compete with smartphones and tablets that run Google's Android operating system. Mountain View, California-based Google is also the owner of the world's most popular search engine.

Tom Neumayr, a spokesman at Apple, declined to comment.

IOS Vs Android

Apple is seeking to build confidence in iOS amid a growing battle with Google, which provides the Android platform to mobile-phone makers such as Samsung Electronics Co. (005930) and HTC Corp. (2498) for free.

Booming demand for Android-based smartphones is helping Google add share at the expense of other software providers, Google Chairman Eric Schmidt said Dec. 11 in an interview at Bloomberg's headquarters in New York.

Android snared 72 percent of the market in the third quarter, while Apple had 14 percent, according to Gartner Inc. Customers are activating more than 1.3 million Android devices a day, Schmidt said.

While Apple's map program doesn't appear to have hurt sales of the iPhone 5, Cook said he was "extremely sorry for the frustration" the app had caused consumers. "We are doing everything we can to make Maps better," Cook wrote in a letter to customers posted on its website.

'Their Call'
Schmidt said on Sept. 25 that Apple should have stuck with Google Maps. “It would have been better if they had kept ours,” Schmidt said in Tokyo. “What were we going to do, force them not to change their mind? It’s their call.”

Google has been building out its online mapping software since 2005, using cars and satellites to accumulate data that helps improve its accuracy and reliability.

A team at Apple has been working to fix the mapping mistakes, focusing first on some of the most glaring problems, said one person familiar with the matter. The satellite imagery over the U.K. has been improved and labels for popular U.S. landmarks such as the Washington Monument have been corrected.

Apple, which also eliminated the preinstalled app for Google’s YouTube video service, built the replacement map program because it wanted to scale back its relationship with Google, two people familiar with Apple’s development of maps said in September. Google then separately released its YouTube app for the iPhone and iPad.

**TomTom Shares**

Apple’s bungled introduction of new mapping features contributed to the ouster of mobile-software chief Scott Forstall, whose departure was announced in October.

In the past few years, Apple has acquired small mapping companies including C3 Technologies, Poly9 and Placebase. Apple is licensing location information from TomTom NV (TOM2) and OpenStreetMap.

Shares of TomTom, the Dutch supplier of navigation applications, rose the most in eight weeks in Amsterdam yesterday after an analyst at Rabobank International said the U.S. company may make a takeover bid.

There’s a 30 percent chance that Apple will seek a purchase, because the Dutch software maker has the capacity to make speedy changes to correct any mapping errors or create new functions, Hans Sloh, an Utrecht, Netherlands-based analyst at Rabobank, said yesterday in a research report.

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