CASE STUDY

Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta Pushes to Make Avenza's PDF Maps App a Standard for International Event

Largest Ballooning Event Provides Unique Navigational Tool to Balloon Operators

Every year hundreds of thousands of people from all over the globe travel to Albuquerque, New Mexico for the largest international ballooning event. During this nine-day fiesta, guests are able to view hundreds of colorful and unique hot air balloons touring the skies over 350 acres of Balloon Fiesta Park. Because the event covers such a large vicinity, Information Systems Manager, Mike McKnight, explained that the need for a clear, easy to use, map was not only important for the pilots, but for the guests as well and so McKnight went searching for a digital solution.

Avenza Systems, Inc., a leading developer of cartographic software, had recently created a mobile app called PDF Maps for the iOS (iPhones and iPads) platform so that map publishers and individual cartographers could upload paper maps at no cost. Now in a digital format, maps could easily be downloaded onto an iPad or iPhone. Paired together with mobile devices that use GPS, the PDF Maps app provided the best of all worlds – the ability to read details clearly like a paper map, find your location with GPS and search for direction like a Google map.

When McKnight discovered Avenza's PDF Maps app could offer crystal-clear, interactive digital maps, he was thrilled. "I had been looking for something like this for years," McKnight explained, "most companies that made GIS conversions for maps used equipment that was just too small; and the larger PDF conversions were only able to be viewed with a laptop. When you're hundreds of feet above the ground in a hot air balloon, a bulky laptop or for that matter, a jumbo-sized paper map just isn't suitable."
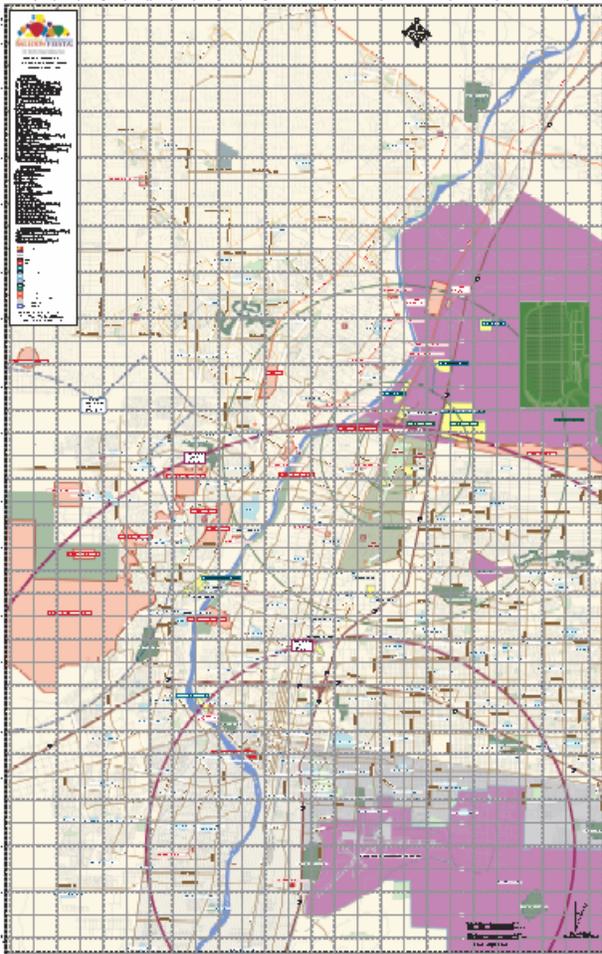
With Avenza's Maps app, balloonists and guests can download maps through the Avenza Map Store 24-hours a day.

Balloon Fiesta Map as seen on the PDF Maps app

Through this technology, pilots as well as tourists traveling to this extraordinary ballooning event can easily prepare well in advance, quickly and conveniently.

With the use of Avenza's PDF Maps app, McKnight was able to transfer large 5'x3' traditional paper maps to digitized, interactive PDFs. This simple transfer of data from traditional maps to digitized PDF garnered approval from the pilots. "Over a period of several days, a paper map of this size can get easily abused and cumbersome for pilots that need to navigate over a set course," said McKnight. "The beauty of accessing maps through the PDF Maps app is that pilots can view them on their iPads and know exactly where they are in the sky– no more fussing with big, bulky paper maps that need to be folded and refolded. Pilots appreciate the fact that they can just scroll with the touch of your finger" McKnight stated. And all this can happen offline hundreds of feet above the ground. With Avenza's high-quality maps, balloon pilots are able view their location in relation to restricted areas and stay clear of prohibited zones such as airport flight paths and ranches that may have livestock which are easily frightened.

Balloon Fiesta map as seen as a 5'x3' paper map

The Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta first began utilizing Avenza's PDF maps in 2009, with only a dozen pilots. "The few balloon operators that used the technology really found it useful. With Avenza's PDF Maps app, they could see their geographical coordinates as they moved, and that's an essential feature that we could never get with traditional maps," McKnight shared.

Minimizing the chance of pilots drifting into unsafe zones that could potentially damage their balloons or the property below them, PDF Maps app ensured that both balloon operators and enthusiasts could appreciate the experience and enjoy the views.

The maps have become a growing sensation at the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta and this year McKnight expects to see several hundred pilots utilize the PDF Maps app for navigation with even more in the coming years. "In regards to the event as a whole, I believe these maps have really helped us grow and evolve. We just love the technology behind them and I see this

event evolving using the Avenza PDF Maps app."

In the future, McKnight hopes to make the event more tourist-friendly by providing a way in which crowds could track the movement of particular balloons. He's aware he'll need to put a few more hours into developing a functioning map before it comes to fruition, but he knows the technology is there and more importantly, a growing base of fans willing to use it at such an interactive event.

More about Avenza's PDF Maps app

Avenza's PDF Maps app is an all-inclusive solution for the transfer of conventional paper maps to digitized, interactive PDFs readily available for handheld mobile devices on the iOS platform. It allows for consumers and businesses to utilize and purchase maps directly to and from their devices; any geo-referenced map may be uploaded and made available for purchase in a compressed, digital version which is both visually brilliant as well as convenient.

Avenza PDF maps app features the ability to:
- Search for places and points of interest on any map using the Google database
- Export, import and share waypoints and associated attribute data, including photos
- Measure distances and areas and estimate walking times
- Download and carry multiple maps on one device similar to music and books
- Import KML waypoints (including images and custom pins) exported from PDF Maps or other software such as Google Earth or Avenza MAPublisher

More about Avenza Systems Inc.

Avenza Systems Inc. is an award-winning, privately held corporation that provides cartographers and GIS professionals with powerful software tools for making better maps. In addition to software offerings for Mac and Windows users, Avenza offers value-added data sets, product training, and consulting services. For more information visit www.avenza.com or call (416) 487-5116.

# # #