

This GIS package layers open source, versatility

GCN Lab Review: MapInfo 9.5 gets a 10 for power, flexibility

- By [Trudy Walsh](#)
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GCN Lab Review

Pros: Works with plethora of files, packages, tools

Cons: Has a significant learning curve

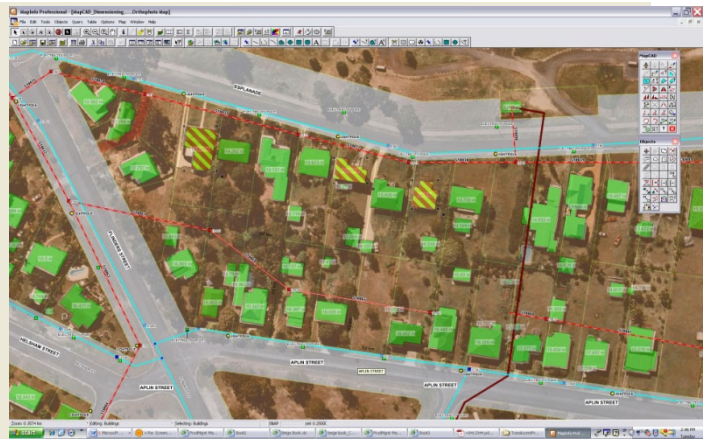
Performance: A

Features: A

Ease of use: C+

Value: B+

Price: \$1645



The cartoon character Shrek famously said that ogres were like onions because they had layers. Let me borrow from Shrek to say that MapInfo Professional Version 9.5 is a little like an onion: It has layers, and at times it made me want to cry.

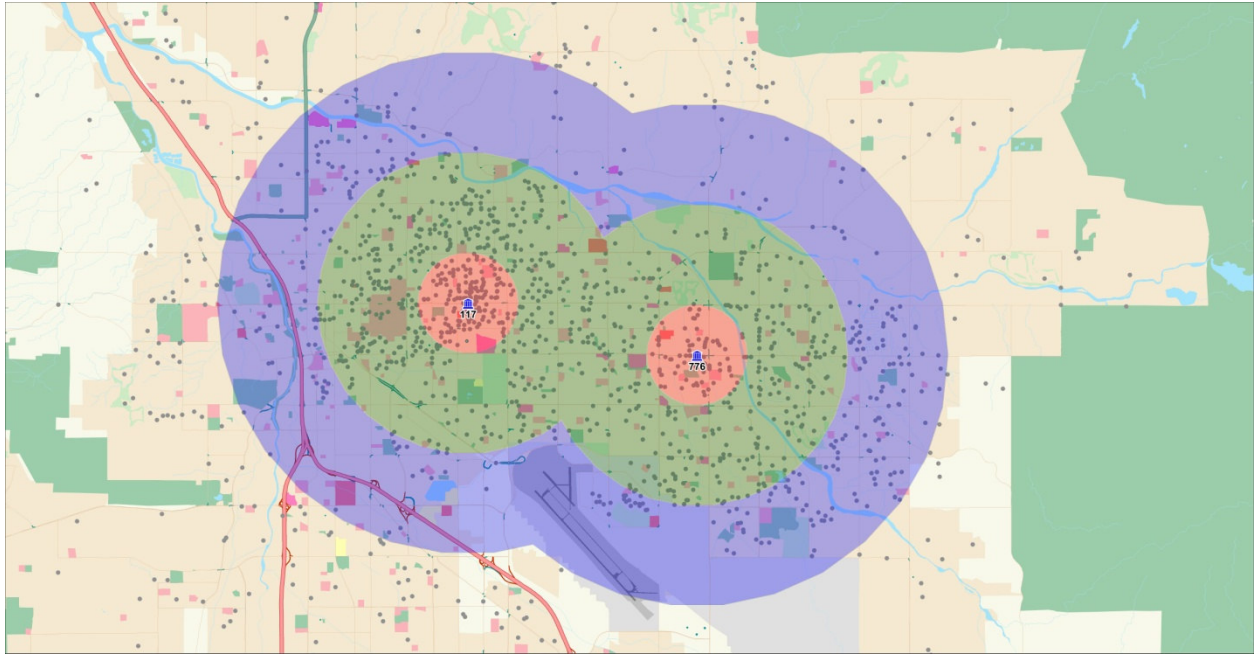
And it's a little like an ogre, too, because it's big and powerful. MapInfo Professional 9.5 is a serious geographic information system. It lets you map layers of transportation data, school districts, landmarks, water features, topography, and many other data sets. You can keep adding layers until you get a picture of a city, state or country that is almost perfect, or parfait, as Shrek's cohort Donkey would say, in its many-layered depiction of an area.

The part that made me want to cry was that there was so much data, it was at times overwhelming for the casual GIS tourist. When I opened the MapInfo 9.5 box, I was surprised to see that it had a 570-page user guide. And this was the abridged version. I thought, gee, I don't want a Ph.D. in MapInfo, I just want to set up a couple of maps with a few layers of information on them. After several hours of working with MapInfo, however, I was glad I had the book.

Fortunately, MapInfo offers a host of training classes and online tutorials. This is not point-and-click mapping like Google Earth. This is for people who want to do serious planning for school districts or evacuation routes. First responders, urban planners and federal, state and local officials who need to map any kind of civic, government, transportation, utility or demographic

data will benefit greatly from MapInfo 9.5.

MapInfo comes with two disks, one for the MapInfo software and one that's loaded with data, which included maps of the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, oceans, world capitals, landmarks and pretty much any square foot of this big blue marble you'd care to map.



This version of MapInfo has taken great pains to work in an open source way with as many other kinds of files, systems and software as possible.

It works with Crystal Reports, Excel files, Oracle 11g, Microsoft SQL Server 2008, ESRI Shapefiles, and yes, Google Earth. An Internet connection is helpful, because it lets you pull in data from other geospatial servers worldwide, although you can use MapInfo as a standalone product too.

MapInfo Professional 9.5 also supports Microsoft's .NET programming language, which lets you use Visual Studio. It also gives you access to the Open Geospatial Consortium's Web Feature Service, a service offered by an international standards consortium that lets clients retrieve and update geospatial data encoded in Geography Markup Language.

I could easily download into MapInfo map data from the U.S. Geological Survey Earth Resources Observation and Science data center map server, MIT's OrthoWeb mapping server, the Intergraph World Map and other online data sources.

MapInfo also offers an online geocoding service called Envinsa. You can sign up for a free trial or buy a yearly subscription for between \$1,000 and \$1,800. Envinsa is constantly updated with information about road changes and other location-based data. It lets you access data sets including drive times and parcel data via the Internet. It also provides a lot of metadata, such as

the speed limits and directions of roads.



The data loaded quickly on GCN's HP Pavilion zd7000 laptop with a 2.8 GHz Pentium 4 processor and 512M of RAM running Microsoft Windows XP.

As a casual map aficionado, I found MapInfo fun to work with after I had mastered a few simple file opening techniques. Not only can you slice and dice the map data, you can julienne, fricasse and filet your maps. You can map the Mississippi River, spin it around and map every bridge that crosses it. You can pull out just some of the data, or insert pie charts that display the data in slices.

You can click on a spot and MapInfo will show you a postcard of the address, including the latitude and longitude. I clicked on what I thought were GCN's old office in downtown Washington. The geocoded postcard came up as the nearby bus station, so I was fairly close.

For serious mapping, MapInfo Professional 9.5 is powerful, flexible and open. Not only is it like an ogre (powerful) and an onion (many-layered), it's also a little like a parfait in that it hits the spot.

Pitney Bowes MapInfo, 800-327-8627, www.mapinfo.com

About the Author

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