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Google Launches Ingress, a Worldwide Mobile Alternate Reality Game

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What's the wackiest thing you can imagine Google launching? How about a game to fight for control of the minds of everyone on earth?

Or maybe that's not so wacky.

Meet Ingress (https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/http://www.ingress.com/), a new free mobile app and alternate reality game made by Google launching today (on Android first, available as soon as it makes it through the Google Play release process).

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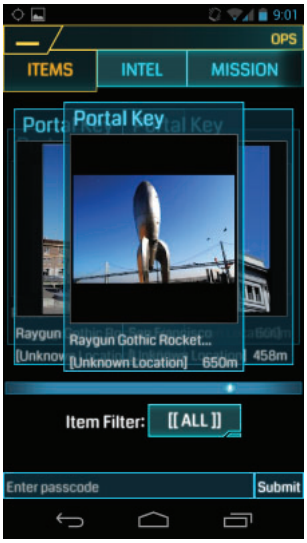
Ingress is a project of former Google director of geo John Hanke and his Niantic Labs, a start-up team wholly inside of Google.

"This grew out of us thinking about notion of ubiquitous computing," Hanke told **AllThingsD** this week. "The device melts away."



(https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/http://allthingsd.com/files/2012/11/4-PortalKey.png)Ingress also aims to get people out in the physical world, both for physical activity and to see their surroundings in a new way.

Users can generate virtual energy needed to play the game by picking up units of "XM," which are collected by traveling walking paths, like a real-world version of Pac-Man. Then they spend the energy going on missions around the world to "portals," which are virtually associated with public art, libraries and other widely accessible places.

"The concept is something like World of Warcraft, where everyone in world is playing the same game," Hanke said. Players are on one of two teams: "The Enlightened," who embrace the power, or "The Resistance," who fight the power. Anyone can play from anywhere in the world, though in more densely played areas there will be more local competition for resources.

Outdoor physical activity is a big component of this, though driving between locations isn't banned. "You're like a rat in a maze on the phone," Hanke said. Then, back at your computer, you can review the larger area and gameplay.

If self-driving cars or computer glasses are a head-scratching fit for Google, Ingress is perhaps even more so, because it's a content project that's expressly askew from reality. The company has hired game writers and artists, and hopes to stay a month or two ahead of the audience, Hanke said.

(You have to admit, this might be pretty fantastic to play from the point of view of those Google glasses.)

(https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/http://allthingsd.com/files/2012/11/7-ScannerZoomed.png)But Hanke contended that the game will be good for Google's business from the beginning. That's because of advertising. Ingress incorporates real physical stores and products in the game, and has brokered relationships with Hint Water, Zipcar, Jamba Juice and Chrome apparel and messenger bags.

And eventually, Google plans to make these real-world game tools available as a platform for developers to make their own.

Hanke said he wants the game to be a living creation that's shaped by its players. Some early public teasers of the game on a dummy Niantic Project (https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/http://www.nianticproject.com/) Web site had generated a lot of interest in Russia, Hanke said, so the team wrote some "aspects of Russia" into the game.

Niantic also wants the game to end at some point, or at least have a good stopping point in a year and a half or so.

In the Sinofsky Departure, Bill Gates Sided With the Other Steve (Ballmer) at Microsoft (https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/the-sinofsky-departure-bill-gates-sided-with-the-other-steve-ballmer-at-microsoft/?mod=ATD_featured_posts_widget)
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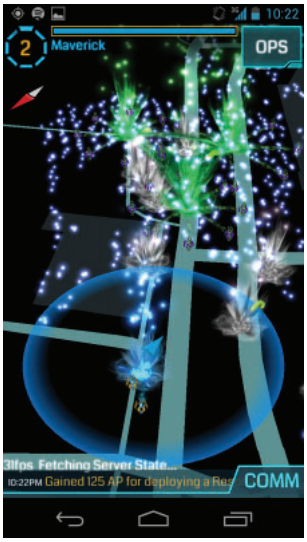
Following someone on Twitter & then complaining about what they tweet about is like stalking someone & complaining that they walk too fast.

— Ricky Gervais, via Twitter



"We were definitely inspired by JJ Abrams," Hanke said, "but we don't want to leave people in 'Lost' situation where they get into fiction of world but then it never ends."

Niantic's first public product was Field Trip (https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nianticproject.scout&hl=en), also a mobile geo app for Android, released in September (https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/http://allthingsd.com/20120927/notifications-as-a-platform-googles-new-field-trip-app-pushes-fun-local-facts/). Hanke described the factoid-finding Field Trip as "more of a mainstream Web tool," and Ingress as an option for people who are more comfortable with gaming and sci-fi.

The project, which was internally named Nemesis, has been tested by Google employees for the past six months.

Here's what it looks like (https://web.archive.org/web/20121115163246/http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92rYjlxqypM&feature=youtu.be):

Adobe Flash Player is no longer supported

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