

Lost? X-ray vision gets you mobile

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LOST in a big city? It's a familiar experience. So imagine if you could use X-ray vision to see what was on the other side of the building in front of you.

It sounds like science fiction, but researchers from the University of South Australia have developed computer software designed for mobile phones that can achieve just that.

Dr Christian Sandor said the application worked by using the phone's camera. Users point the camera at a building and an image of it appears on the screen. Then, in a clever trick, the image changes to show what is behind the building, as if it were no longer there.

The technology, known as augmented reality, appears to be X-ray vision, but in reality it uses pictures and images that already exist in databases such as Google Earth and Google Streetview.

Dr Sandor said the technology could not be used by peeping Toms to see into people's houses because only the exterior views of buildings and streets are held in the databases. The application needs two pieces of information to work - a 3D model of the area or city the phone user is in, and their exact position.

A 3D model of a city can be built using information collected from aerial surveys combined with images from databases like Google Earth and Google Streetview, Dr Sandor said.

GPS is used to work out the user's exact position. Once the software knows this information, it uses information and images from the 3D model to display a picture of what is behind the building.

He said the research group was working with Nokia to build an "X-ray vision" mobile phone application, which they hoped could be released within two years.

Augmented reality technologies have only become possible in the past 10 years because of the development of sophisticated networks such as Google Earth and Streetview, Dr Sandor said.

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