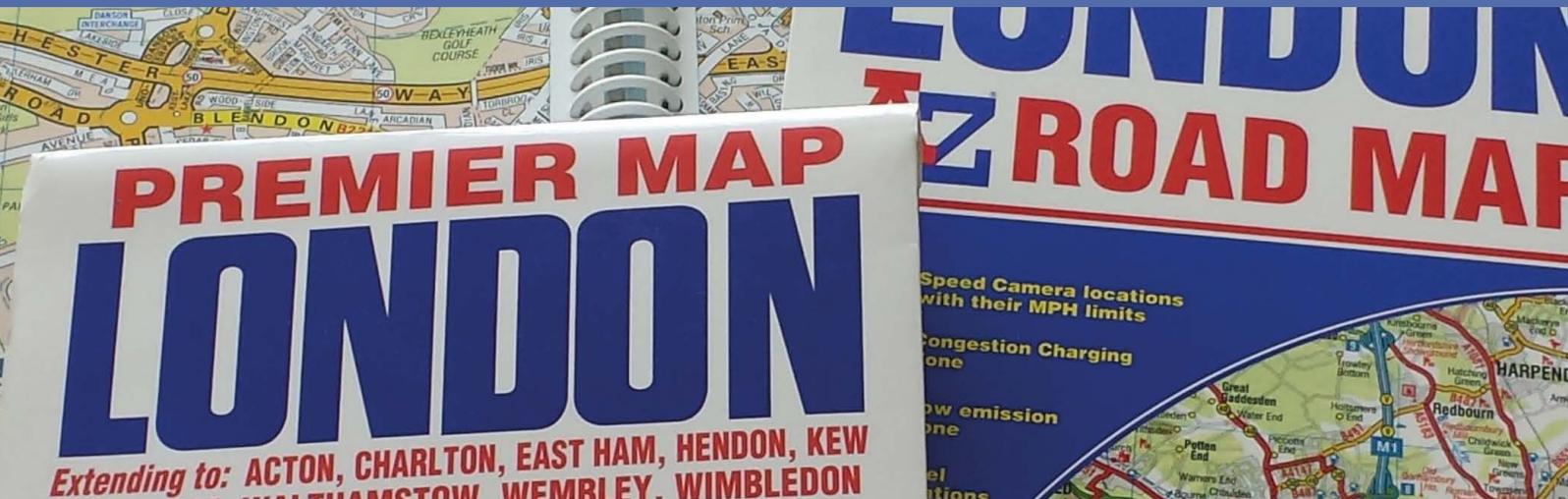


# Paper Maps among the Digital Apps - Where Do We Go from Here?

Geographer's A-Z Map Company works with Rotolito Lombarda to produce maps for today's market



While there will always be those who endlessly pore over maps, contemporary needs and technologies have created different expectations and uses. Yet, the Geographer's A-Z Map Company, working with Rotolito Lombarda, is seeing a resurgence of interest in paper maps amid the digital apps.

## Remapping the face of cartography

In 1936, founder Phyllis Pearsall published The A-Z Atlas and Guide to London and Suburbs with the help of a draughtsman. The black and white guide indexed the London streets and provided large-scale maps noting many local buildings, post offices, underground stations, churches, and other useful sites.

The Geographer's Map Company survived the war and the paper usage restrictions of the 1950s, expanding the range of paper atlases and maps as well as extending coverage to dozens of UK cities. Over time, the A-Z Atlas has become virtually indispensable for drivers, pedestrians and users of public transport.

However, the digital age presented new challenges with the arrival of CD-ROMs, DVDs, online maps, and readily available and inexpensive GPS navigation.

"We had some tough decisions to make," said Tim Heathfield, Production Director of Geographer's A-Z Map Co. Ltd. "We had the advantage of a strong,

well-recognised brand, but sales of maps and atlases were being hit and we knew we would not be able to compete with the big brands in digital mapping."

The company knew it had to evolve, but knowing how and what it should supply was difficult to see.

"We experimented with CDs and DVDs, which were popular at first, but with the rise of USB devices, in-car satnav, and smartphones, those sales declined," Heathfield explained. "We still publish a smartphone app with maps for London, but there isn't the demand in other cities."

It's not only the digital map applications that have put pressure on map publishers.

"Buying books and maps on-line has changed the way that high street bookstores display their products," Heathfield continues. "Where a bookstore might have had two metres of shelf space for maps in the past, today, might have only one. Similarly, on-line sites only show a small selection at any one time. That

means to have as many of our different products as possible on view, we've had to scale back the number of product variations. Quite simply, what doesn't get seen doesn't get sold."

For example, the company no longer produces case-bound atlases but focuses on perfect and spiral bound products in A4 and A5 formats. Today, are six or seven different styles, rather than the previous 15.

## The right direction

Since 2000, Rotolito Lombarda has printed many of Geographer's A-Z's maps in a variety of formats and bindings, and worked with the company to deliver products that meet the demands of today's map-buying customers.

"Back in the 1990s, our printing was pretty much with one large British printing company," Heathfield said. "When it hit turbulent times, changed ownership and re-invented itself a few times, we realised that it was not a good idea to have all our eggs in one basket."

Heathfield and colleagues from the company went to the London Book Fair in 2000 in the hope of meeting several printers that could help them spread the risk while delivering the quality and response they were used to.

"I met Adam Phillips – Rotolito's representative in the UK - at the fair and shortly after we began working with them," he said. "We have been really impressed with the company's policy of reinvesting in state of the art equipment. It makes a significant difference to quality and reliability of deliveries. Its ability to do virtually everything in-house also means that it has an eye on quality and keeping to schedules.

"We also like the personal relationships we have with Rotolito," Heathfield continued. "These have grown over the years and mean that there are people who really understand our business and can help us."

Rotolito currently carries out a large proportion of Geographer's A-Z's printing, most of it sheet-fed.

"We seldom have volumes that justify web offset production, but we have been talking to the company about using one of its colour inkjet presses for certain publications. The range of substrates it can print on make it an attractive possibility."

## Mapping reality

Geographer's A-Z has a catalogue of 340 products, making it the UK's largest map publishing company. Many of the Kent-based team are in the cartography department, making new maps and making changes to the existing ones. Much of this work requires on-the-street investigations to determine exactly how the maps should be adjusted to reflect reality.

"For example, when part of a street is pedestrianised, it's important that it is no longer shows as a thoroughfare," said Heathfield. "Our maps are based on the Ordnance Survey, but include many different details."

It is changes like these that make map-making and printing a continuous business, but it doesn't explain why the sales of paper atlases and maps are currently rising.

"It's surprising how many areas of the UK are still not mapped to the street level," Heathfield said. "Working on those maps along with our others should keep us – and Rotolito – busy for some time.

"A satnav is a wonderful thing to get you from A to B, but it doesn't show you what's along the way," he concluded. "Being able to look around your route and notice places of interest, or suddenly discover that you're nearer to something than you thought you were is very valuable and something that only paper maps can do. They can enrich what would otherwise be a rather mundane trip."

