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## Thomas guide maps

Thomas Guide is a series of American street atlases that features detailed maps of major metropolitan areas across the United States. These spiral-bound guides are arranged by county and provide comprehensive information on streets, points of interest, and arterial maps for easy navigation. Initially published in Oakland, California, Thomas Bros. Maps became a local icon in Southern California for decades, with many companies incorporating their map grid information into advertisements. The company was founded in 1915 by George Coupland Thomas and his brothers as Popular Street Atlas, later known as Street Guide, and finally Thomas Guide. Thomas Bros. Maps history began in the late 1940s with pocket-sized guidebooks of California and San Francisco. The company expanded its services to several counties in California and one in Washington. After George Coupland's death in 1955, Warren B. Wilson acquired the company and moved it to a new facility in Irvine, California in 1980. Wilson led the company into the digital age and hired multiple CEOs to allow him more time for personal pursuits. In the 1990s, Thomas Bros. Maps partnered with several large clients, including the California Highway Patrol and area cities. The company's map database had a monopoly due to its high-quality street address indexes. However, poor sales of guidebooks in Washington, D.C., and Virginia led to significant debt. The company attempted to expand on the East Coast but failed. In 1999, Thomas Bros. Maps was purchased by Rand McNally and became a wholly-owned subsidiary. The new CEO implemented radical changes in 2003, laying off many skilled cartographers and employees. The Irvine data center began outsourcing work to Bangalore, India, and made significant cost-cutting measures. Many guides were no longer printed yearly, and the POI index was no longer updated. The Thomas Bros. Maps company had shut down its operations in key locations like San Francisco, downtown Los Angeles, and South Coast Plaza Mall several years prior. Although their maps are still being sold, the digital map database that made them famous has become outdated. Instead of creating new data from scratch, Rand McNally now purchases and updates its map information from larger companies such as Tele Atlas and Navteq. The new street data is then overlaid onto their existing database for publication. In 2021, an updated Thomas Guide for Los Angeles and Orange Counties was released, three years after the previous edition. Despite no longer having employees or customer service in California since laying off its final Irvine staff in 2009, Rand McNally continues to sell a significant number of guides each year, with around 1,000 to 1,500 copies sold annually. The Thomas Maps brand's majority owner, Larry Thomas, noted that the company's products remain essential for police and fire vehicles due to California state legislation. Interestingly, until the late 1970s, it was draftsmen rather than cartographers who compiled and updated maps every year. These maps came in various scales and sizes, but presented challenges as communities expanded during the post-war period, particularly when dealing with Earth's curvature. Large wall maps were composed of smaller units, making street alignment a complex task. To protect copyrights, Easter eggs or deliberate errors were intentionally included on maps. These usually took the form of fictional lakes, parks, or landmarks; however, fictitious streets were avoided due to their widespread use by emergency services. The company's innovative approach in the 1990s led to numerous advancements in the map industry, including establishing a map education foundation and creating a computer map database with live digital updates. Thomas Bros. Maps was also the first publishing company to set up a digital map page and grid look-up system for the entire world. Many long-time users can still recall their exact page and grid coordinates, even if they haven't used the maps in years. The Thomas Guides have become an essential tool for specifying locations in Southern California, with governments, businesses, and emergency response agencies often referencing a "Thomas Guide" page number and map grid to pinpoint a location. Guide wall maps for delivery businesses and offer custom versions with additional features such as census tracts and watershed boundaries. CD-ROM digital editions of Thomas Guide atlases are available, and the database can be licensed for use in geographical information systems applications. The Thomas Guides company updates its products annually, but some map content is updated only every other year. Other products include folding maps, street guides, and traditional fold-out versions covering regions not covered by the Thomas Guides. In 2011, it was reported that the Central Library in Los Angeles had 200 copies of the Thomas Guide stored on site. The map's popularity waned with the rise of GPS and traffic apps, but new editions are set to be released next week, marking the first time in three years since updates were last published. Cartographers and map distributors face cut costs, yet the Thomas Guide surprisingly still exists. This guide was once destined to fade away into nostalgia but didn't disappear. Currently, only two guides are being produced - L.A./Orange County and San Diego/Imperial counties. However, with California state legislation requiring every police and fire vehicle to have a Thomas Guide on board due to GPS limitations in remote areas, sales expectations are high. Additionally, the guide is also bought by emergency responders who require laminated copies due to frequent usage. As a distributor for Rand McNally, Thomas Maps provides custom maps with detailed information for various agencies. The company's founder, Larry Thomas, took advantage of his last name being compatible with the original owners', allowing him to keep the business running smoothly.

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