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Let's have another cup of coffee

Karen Schwartz, Columbia News Service=

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When it comes to cafe choices and finding a good cup of coffee, a three-person California artists' collective wants people to know there are options beyond the Starbucks down the street.

That's why the three started [Delocator.net](#), a website launched April 1 that, taking its cue from the hugely popular online store

locators, lets people search by ZIP code for alternatives to the coffee-house chains.

The site also lets visitors enter the names and addresses of their favorite haunts, along with comments about what makes each place special. In its first two weeks, they added almost 3,000 independent coffee shops.

The site is designed to give the cafes a voice, said Xtine Hanson, 30, an artist from Long Beach, Calif., and one of the founders of Finishing School, the artists' collective.

A voice for the underdog

"It's anti-corporation more than anti-Starbucks," she said. "It's mostly like 'Let's have a voice for the underdog' of the independent cafes, for those people who are still living their American dream and having their business."

Starbucks helped spawn the coffee-shop culture, but, with 9,261 corner-dwelling copies worldwide, it has become, to some, a prime example of excessive corporate control and standardization. Critics like Hanson question whether being able to drive to any corner in any town and get the same drink is a good thing.

Maps included

On the website, store names, along with comments on what makes them "authentic," run down one side of the page, while the Starbucks locations run along the other. But where the Starbucks list includes just addresses and phone numbers, the list of independent stores has links to maps and even photographs submitted by site visitors.

"That list looks a lot more authentic, less homogenized," Hanson said.

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"These cafes each have a voice; they each have their own idiosyncrasies."

The site is set up so that visitors have the option of starting their own projects. In addition to offering alternatives to corporate coffee, the site includes a tool kit that visitors may download, complete with all the code needed to create a delocator site for anything from Wal-Mart to Borders or McDonald's.

Brian Boyer, 29, a Finishing School member, said the artists came up with the idea on a stroll around New York. They were looking for somewhere to get coffee, but since they weren't familiar with the area, they didn't know where to look for something that wasn't Starbucks.

Open for input

The collective entered the thousands of Starbucks locations into the database by hand, copying and pasting from the Starbucks locator site. But the other half of the database was empty, awaiting people's preferences. "So seeing people enter in their cafe alternatives was nice because they were completing it," Boyer said. Website visitors added 3,000 sites in the first two weeks.

Visitors can search for coffee shops within 5 miles of any ZIP code.

Boyer said he was surprised at the number of cafes added to the website. "There are 6,000 Starbucks stores in the United States. It'd be great if we got to 6,000 local coffee houses being entered," he said.

"The fear is that those places you go to might one day not be there, whether or not that is true," said Boyer. "It's nice to be reminded of that, that those places are still there and will probably always still be there."

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