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John Foley

Editor, InformationWeek

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Public Can 'Participate' In NASA's Lunar Mission

Posted by [John Foley](#) on June 18, 2009 02:12 PM

NASA's launch of the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter and the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite marks one of the space agency's first "participatory missions," says Chris Kemp, CIO of NASA's Ames Research Center. From their backyards, as well as from Moon-gazing tools from Google and Microsoft, the public will be able to view high-resolution images of our celestial neighbor.

The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS) are scheduled to launch together on an Atlas V rocket today, June 18, between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Eastern time. The purpose of the mission is to measure the Moon so that its surface can be more precisely mapped in high resolution. The LRO will orbit the Moon from 31 miles above its surface taking measurements, while LCROSS will eventually drop the two-and-a-half-ton spent Atlas rocket onto the Moon's surface, creating a crater and debris cloud that will be scanned for scientific data. Then LCROSS, too, will crash into the Moon's surface. For more, see the [LRO site](#) and [LCROSS site](#).

The whole event promises to be a sight to behold, and astronomers, including amateurs with good telescopes, will be able to view it from Earth. For the rest of us, there's [Google Moon](#) and Microsoft Research's [Worldwide Telescope](#), Web tools that provide high-res images of the Moon.

According to Kemp, NASA has been working with Google and Microsoft to ensure that data and images from its new lunar mission are available to the public through their respective sites. NASA makes much of the same data and imagery available on its own Web sites, but Kemp says that Google and Microsoft reach a different and wider audience. "Platforms like Google's and Microsoft's are truly designed to make the content more accessible to anyone," he says.

In March, [NASA and Microsoft announced](#) an agreement to develop technology to make more than 100 terabytes of NASA data available through Microsoft's Worldwide Telescope. Separately, NASA's Planetary Content Team has worked with Google to let users create their own Moon maps using the Google Maps API. (See [NASA's Planetary Content site](#).)

You can view the live LRO/LCROSS launch on [NASA TV](#).

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Something bugs me about crashing our junk into other planets

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and our universe in general. Can't we be a little cleaner and neater while going about our space exploration business? We've made a huge freaking mess out of the planet we live on. Why muck up anything else until we get our own house in order?

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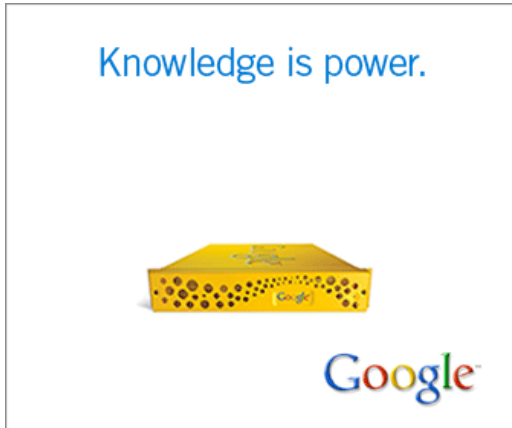
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