



MEASURE FOR MEASURE

A NEW DEVELOPMENT COULD TAKE GEOSPATIAL MARKETING MAINSTREAM BY PUTTING NUMBERS ON ITS TRUE WORTH

“But how do I know if the money I will spend on marketing is going to work?” is a very common question when selling marketing services to the famously resistant geospatial industry. Scientifically-based companies rarely hesitate to spend money on specialist programmers, technicians or engineers; indeed, this is very often referred to as ‘investing’ in the company. But they very often also believe that the quality of their products will speak for itself and that customers will come flocking because what has been created is simply the best in the marketplace.

So if you suggest that a company invest in someone who has the skills and experience to promote and create a need for the product, you’ll often get the question above and the crucial marketing role will eventually be given as an additional responsibility to an existing member of staff.

As is so often the case, proof as to why marketing is needed doesn’t come from the study of science or business, but of history. In no particular order of failure, do you remember: Mattel Intellivision, Betamax, Sega Dreamcast, LaserDisc, the Psion Organiser, Digital Audio Tape, Lotus Magellan, the Apple Newton, the Microsoft Zune, DIVX and the Sharp Zaurus? Each was considered technologically superior to the competition of its day and each failed because its creators did not understand the customer’s need or could not communicate a vital message.

While it used to be true that measuring marketing success was a dark art rather than a science, the development of ‘marketing metrics’ – or, to use words that appear to be beyond marketers, measuring things – has changed this.

Last November was the 10th anniversary of the release of Google Analytics. Now by far the most commonly used web analytics product, it allows companies to interrogate data about every aspect of a visitor’s journey to, through and from their websites. It has enabled marketing adherents and sceptics alike to argue the relative merits of campaigns based on the traffic to the website. For this reason, Google Analytics is integrated into the marketing report processes of just about every company in the world.

Now, a recent development from Sparkgeo has provided yet further proof of the continuous creep towards the commercial mainstream by the geospatial industry.

The theory behind Sparkgeo’s Maptiks product is solid. Companies deploy maps on their websites as a matter of course – from a simple ‘this is where we are’ to interactive data-rich examples – but do they know if those maps are enhancing the user experience, being used in the way they were designed to be or being used at all? Maptiks will record clicks, pans and zooms made on the maps. Each of these is referred to as a ‘Map Activity’ and the pattern of these user activities builds up to provide a picture of how effective the map is being.

Sparkgeo explains that recording many millions of these patterns has helped them to understand how to improve map implementations and improve the user experience. For example, if every visitor initialising zooms into a map, it is likely that the starting zoom level is wrong; if visitors start exploring a data-free area of your map, they could have lost interest in what you want to say and be looking for their relatives’ houses! In both cases, work is needed to make the experience of using the map more inviting and ultimately more likely to produce the desired outcome.

There is much to like about this approach and it shows how mapping has moved from a ‘nice to have’ to a standard component of a company’s communication toolbox but one that has to be able to show how it pays its way.

Now people can argue about the effectiveness of marketing and mapping.

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