



SHOW AND TELL

A PICTURE TELLS A THOUSAND WORDS – JUST MAKE SURE THEY’RE INTERESTING WORDS, SAYS ALISTAIR MACLENAN

At the heart of the geospatial industry is the ability to create stunning and hugely useful pictures. Whether these pictures are beautiful colour satellite images that can give the viewer a detailed understanding of a vast area of the earth’s surface or whether they’re a constantly updating digital map that can show the billions of Tweets sent by users from all over the world, geospatial staff are creating images that can tell amazing stories.

Since stories make for really good marketing, it would seem sensible to use these end-product pictures in your marketing collateral and on social media, as a way of promoting your company and the benefits that your work can provide.

Prospective customers would be much more interested in the end results – what geospatial can do for them — than how those results were created, so why so many surveying equipment manufacturers insist on giving us adverts dominated by photographs of their theodolites is beyond me.

Surveying helps to build the roads that expectant parents drive on to the hospitals, which were also built using surveying techniques, so that their brand new bundle of joy safely makes its entrance into this world. Okay, so it’s not the best thought-out screenplay but when you’re trying to grab people’s attention, it’s a thousand miles ahead of showing them that you have changed the colour of the on-off button!

I mentioned social media deliberately. Again, like the term geospatial, it covers a wide range of channels and applications, and the choice of where to put your marketing department’s available time and energy can be confusing.

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+, amongst others, will all battle for your marketing budget and all have a story to tell that will convince you that theirs will be the most effective route to market. It is safe to say that the vast majority of geospatial companies are not using any of these to their full potential but there is one that is almost universally ignored: Instagram.

For those who haven’t seen it – and by the looks of it, that would be quite a number – Instagram enables users to share pictures and videos. It has more than 150 million active users, sharing in the region of 55 million images every single day.

Search for #gis and you’ll see that this hashtag has been used on 63,000 Instagram posts. Extend those three letters to #gisele and you’ll notice that this Brazilian model has amassed more than eight million followers – if they all lived in the same place, they would create the second largest city in Europe after London!

This is often the argument used against nearly all social media – that it is for celebrities and consumer brands, not serious and sensible products such as theodolites.

Which is nonsense. Boeing, IBM and Oracle know this is nonsense, as do Esri, Airbus and DigitalGlobe. They all use Instagram to tell stories which, because of the medium, have to start with a picture. And even if your company doesn’t use this channel (which it should) that is a fantastically useful exercise to perform.

Instagram is the social media ‘elevator pitch’. You have to be able to create a single picture that tells people what it is you do and what the benefits of working with you are. You also have to do it in a way that draws people to it and tells them a story. Not easy – I guess that’s why specialist marketing agencies exist! – but it will become more and more important as more and more people move to consuming marketing information online. Yes, even in the geospatial industry.

INSTAGRAM IS THE SOCIAL MEDIA ‘ELEVATOR PITCH’

Alistair MacLenan is founder of the geospatial B2B marketing agency Quarry One Eleven (www.quarry-one-eleven.com)