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Collaborative working and the implications for GI business models

Graham Wallace looks at how the AGI's Foresight Report 2020 provides the sector with both challenges and opportunities

The purpose of the report (five years on from the last Foresight study 'The UK Geospatial Industry in 2015' published in 2010) is to act as a reference document. It both observes – and as necessary – challenges the current role of GI in relation to these key issues. It promotes the future role the GI sector should play in these areas and what needs to be done to realise this.

Collaboration was a theme which was examined in many of the submissions. There was broad agreement that in order to become more effective, GI practitioners need to extend their reach into organisations and move beyond being a specialist.



Foresight Report 2020 both observes and challenges the current role of Geographic Information on issues that the AGI believes will have a significant impact on our economy, environment and society over the next five years

Operational reality

Sarah Hitchcock's (GeoLytx) assessment of the potential for GI in the Retail market holds good for many other sectors. Her view is that "Retailers have long acknowledged that a web based system with one version of data that can be accessed by all is a key requirement." She goes on to suggest that, "By 2020 most of the largest retailers will have established a web portal that allows access to all users, effectively linking property, marketing, on-line and location planning colleagues." In other words collaborative working will have become the operational reality within large organisations.

The implications of this are perhaps more far-reaching than many people would expect as her conclusion is that "The majority of colleagues will use web-based systems and a dedicated resource will have the full blown desktop or advanced ETL tool". So her view is that in 2020 there will still be a place for desktop GIS, but the reasons for buying them or using them will be limited.



'A web-based system with one version of data that can be accessed by all is a key requirement' – Sarah Hitchcock

This point was emphasised by Gareth Smith of Exprodut in his assessment of the use of GI in the Oil & Gas industry over the next five years. Gareth endorses the view that the way forward is a Platform led approach where data capture from multiple sources, covering web, mobile and ERP systems can and should be shared

in line with agreed security permissions to maximise the benefits of “One source of truth” supported by web based access for large numbers of users, with a core of super users responsible for assembling, analysing and distributing information.



Endorsing the platform-led ‘One source of truth’ approach – Gareth Smith

Datamart

A market development that may well come to fruition within the GI industry over the next five years is the emergence of a “Datamart” led business. A wide variety of mobile apps already deploy the technology to support this type of business model.

For example, entertainment guides that combine restaurant guides, film schedules, details of concerts and community events are all underpinned by programmes that “split” or apportion revenues from each customer visit depending on the services accessed. Although each visit may only be worth pence and the apportionment to each vendor may be measured in fractions of pence, the key to the business model lies in driving traffic to the site and maximising usage and return visits.

Our many contributors considered different dimensions of “collaborative working”, spanning data sharing, organisational collaboration and trends in procurement, data monetisation and SaaS solutions. When we consider that the latest Plimsoll Report on the GI industry highlights that around one third of the GI companies analysed are either generating low growth or delivering low profitability then it’s likely that all of these factors will shape our industry over the next five years.

The net result is that these are likely to encourage changes in the business models of a significant proportion of GI companies: riding the wave of change may appear to be an option – but it’s more likely that developments in collaborative working will re-shape the industry – with some companies struggling whilst others embrace progress.

To see a summary of the report or to download the full version, please go to www.agi.org.uk/foresight

‘The latest Plimsoll Analysis – Geographical Information Systems, was published last month (February) and assesses, values and rates the 8g largest companies in the industry on their attractiveness for takeover. (https://www.plimsoll.co.uk/market-reports/geographical_information_systems)

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