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# The geography of everything

Damian Testa argues that the time is right for the GI industry to raise its profile and work with others to advance a common cause

*Companies such as Uber, AirBnB and TripAdvisor have built their businesses based on location.*

Background image: pratikjaviya



In recent years, it has been geographic information (GI) linked to rapid technological advances that has enabled commercial innovation and disruptive operating models to emerge and thrive, perhaps to a degree we would not have foreseen at the time. Companies such as Uber, AirBnB and TripAdvisor have built their business based on location. Indeed, if you took the location out of these companies, they would not have a business!

Location intelligence then is increasingly reshaping the business landscape, for example by enabling faster and larger scale evidence-based decision making and insight generation. Geospatial data is also shaping national and local government policy-making by acting as the glue for linking other data from a wide range of sources to deliver insight and transform service delivery.

## Like it or loath it

You may like or loathe the rising tide in location based marketing direct to your smart phone or the convenience of near real-time satellite navigation in your car, and 'on the go' maps to get you to your local meetings and events. These would not be possible without location information; this is often the 'seen but not heard' or discreet element of everyday living, meaning we only tend to notice and value it when we need it or when it's not available.

As the GI industry, we must make the value of GI explicit in underpinning business, policy and community decisions. Those companies that have already adopted a GI approach are gaining a competitive advantage. A recent Atos report highlighted that information-centric organisations are 110% more valuable than less analytically-driven peers; with some 50 billion connected objects around the world by 2020, making sense of boundless volumes of data through GI is essential.

I am delighted to have recently taken on the challenge offered

to me by the RGS-IBG and AGI to advance the understanding, application and use of GI as an important enabler to the world of Big Data. These are exciting times. Given the explosion in upstream provision of data, the practical value of GI will be determined by the downstream provision of its analysis and resulting insight and intelligence; in other words, demand for GI will be driven by users. There is little value in collecting data for collection's sake.

## Advancing a common cause

I see my role as philanthropic in that I am advocating an approach rather than a specific GI method or technology (this will rightly be determined by the business problem to be solved); a kind of umbrella that many organisation and business can come under to advance a common cause. RGS-IBG and AGI will be at the centre of this, facilitating and, at times, orchestrating activities to grow the value and demand for GI.

The time is right for the GI industry to raise its profile. There are some real challenges ahead, not least plugging digital skills gaps and the need for data interoperability. But also real opportunities for GI around delivery of a number of government strategies: industrial, food and farming, the environment and digital. Societal changes (such as the ageing population and increasing urbanisation) and advancements in technology (Internet of Things, remote sensing, earth observation, 5G, and autonomous vehicles) will continue to shape the way we live.

Binding these together through geographic/ location based intelligence will revolutionise society.

While the RGS-IBG and AGI can go far in achieving its mission, we can all go further faster by working together.

*I am interested in your thoughts on how we can collaborate going forward.*