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Keeping ahead of the curve

Are you an early adopter, part of an early or late majority, or a technology laggard?
Andy Beckerson poses the question

Geospatial professionals live in a technology-rich environment where the speed of change is no less than in other markets. If you are unfamiliar with the technology adoption lifecycle, the term evolved out of research conducted in the 1950s to describe the acceptance of an innovative new technology, product or service. As such, it's quite interesting to apply it to yourself to see just where the products you use every day fit on the curve.

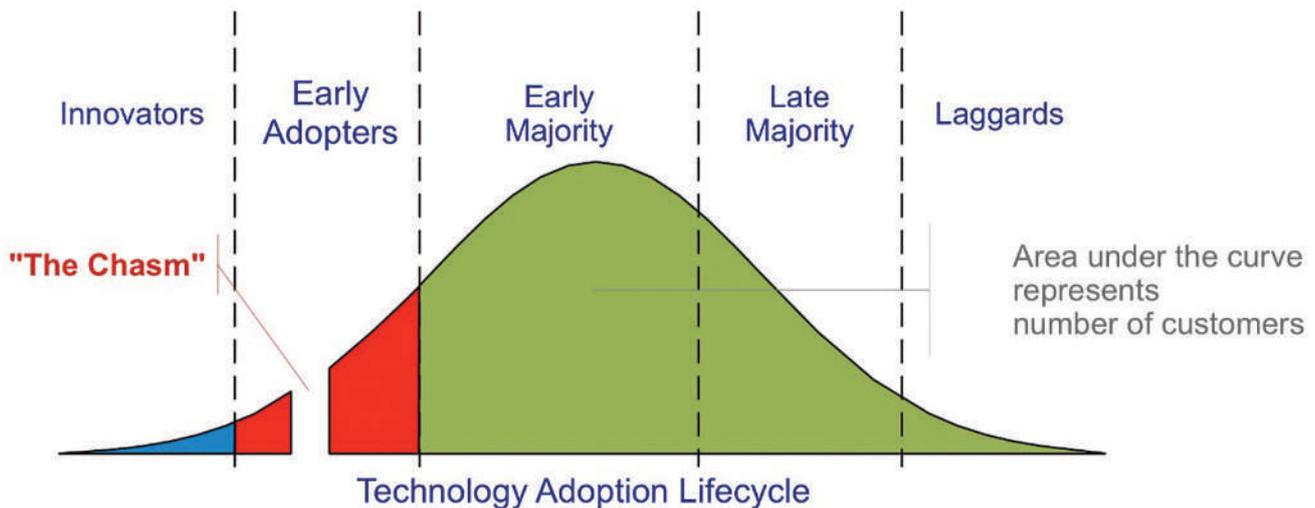
The cycle can be shown in the form of a bell curve (see diagram below) and consumers or users will vary slightly about where on the curve they place technologies. As an example, let's plot the evolution of music purchasing and where today's various music streaming services could be placed in the 'Early Adopters' category. Data downloads might well sit in the 'Early Majority', CDs in the 'Late Majority', and vinyl potentially in the 'Laggards' curve. I know some purists would dispute the latter!

accepted by the 'Early Majority' - there comes the 'Chasm'.

Products or services unable to bridge this 'Chasm' never make it to market because they fail to meet the expectations of the early majority and there is no compelling reason to buy. Moore goes on to explain the 'Chasm' and crossing it or not - something that leads me to mobile data collection and asset management.

In the early days of asset management there was paper and pencil, then along came Excel, then digital data collectors and GIS and, somewhere in between, video. In the early 2000s Survey Supplies had a vehicle-based product called Video Surveyor which manually triangulated assets from digital video frames. It was a product for technology enthusiasts and it worked well, albeit that the cameras were always changing and the software was always bespoke, but it did what it said on the tin.

By combining digital video with GPS positions you could locate



Now take your favourite piece of technology and compare it to competing technologies to see where it might fit on the curve. There is no right and wrong case, but those on the left hand side generally have some technological competitive advantage over those on the right.

Into the chasm

If you'd like to know more about this, Geoffrey A. Moore's book 'Inside the Tornado' describes the various sectors in, what I believe, is a concise way. After the early part of the technology lifecycle - as excitement wanes and the 'Innovators' and 'Early Adopters' lose their initial enthusiasm, but the new technology has not been fully

assets and establish their condition from the captured video - truly early mobile data collection. Unfortunately, Video Surveyor did not cross the 'Chasm'; sales faltered, and the product failed to enter the 'Early Majority' market.

Building bridges

Today, this technique of mobile data collection utilising video and GNSS positioning has bridged the chasm and its adoption is growing, assisted by specialist companies such as Orbit and Horus, among others. They have developed software products to make the process of data extraction much easier, although it is still a largely manual

process that requires clicking on a screen to extract the location of the asset.

In the early days, the type of assets measured were fairly straightforward and I can remember sitting through numerous presentations featuring lamp posts and lighting columns. Today, the situation is very different.

Merton Council, for example, has used mobile mapping to compile a complete set of street furniture and other assets that have a particular relevance. Much of its highways asset data is collected by a Trimble MX8 mounted on a Mercedes van while, for assets in its parks and recreational areas, a Trimble MX2 on a street-legal quad bike (pictured

below) is employed.

Interestingly the 'drivers' for adopting mobile data collection were not simply to keep traffic on the move and minimise public disruption, but also to safeguard mobile field workers from the perils of working in the road - truly an Early Adoption of the 'Trainers off Tarmac' mobile mapping solution!



All terrain data capture using the Trimble MX2 spatial imaging system

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