

Feeling the pinch?

Ben Allan has good news for those whose GIS data management tasks are piling on the pressure

Is the amount of data management work to be done in your organisation outstripping its capacity to deliver? Is work stacking up? If so, it usually means that just one person – quite often the GIS manager - has the specialist skills needed to handle the task. These are what we call pinch points.

As an example, many years ago all maps were created by someone with complex GIS skills. As they were few in number they unfortunately became the pinch points. Luckily, web mapping arrived and provided the basic capability to a larger group of users. The capacity to create maps increased dramatically and the pinch points receded. Critically, the GIS managers moved from doing all the map creation to owning how the maps are created.

This was great for map creation but did little to ease the burden of managing the underlying data, an often repetitive task that continues to consume the time and patience of GIS managers. This often leads to delays which, from an organisational perspective, can deter users from requesting the service. As such, they tend to wait until things go really wrong before seeking urgent help. The result: increased cost and disruption.

A collaborative approach

The answer, as it was for web-mapping, is to split the capability from the capacity. This way, the GIS manager controls the “How” and the data owner controls the “Do”. In essence, the data owners are able to manage far more processes themselves and the GIS manager can focus on creating solutions.

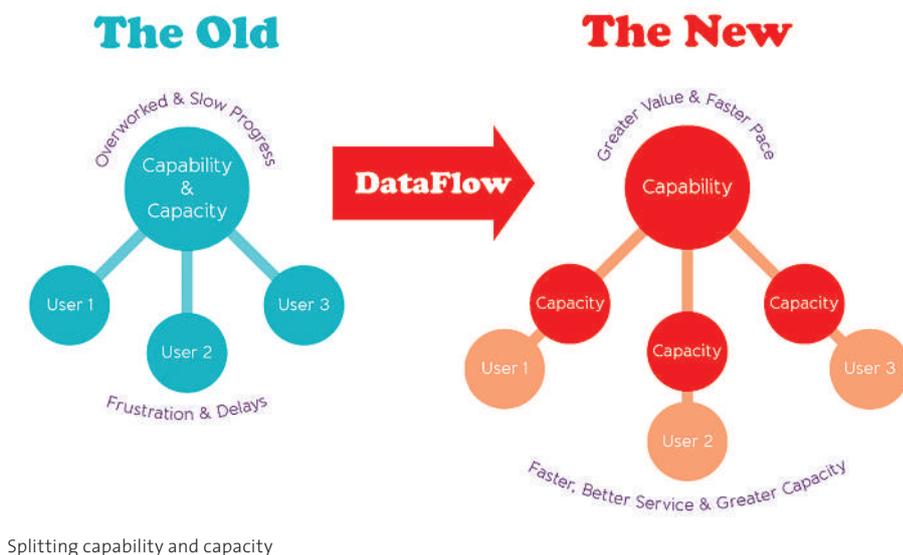
Great in theory, but how do you achieve the split in practice? Birmingham-based miso recognise the conflict between capability and capacity and have developed an appropriate solution. It's called DataFlow and works in a very similar fashion to your smartphone. It has four key components:

DataFlow App – An app that will automate a specific data process flow. These apps can be free or chargeable depending on who creates them. Just like the apps on your phone.

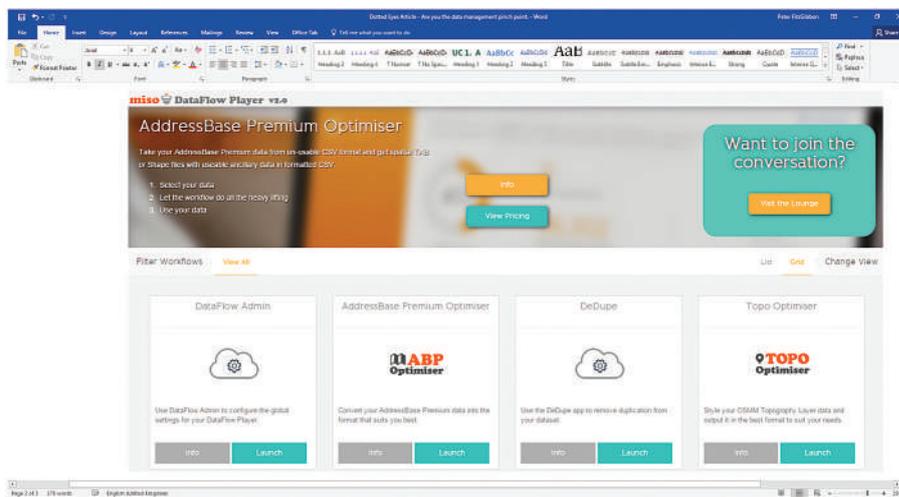
DataFlow Store – Apps are downloaded from here and, just like your phone, the store is free to access.

DataFlow Player – The player is where all your apps live and can be used as and when needed. Just like a music streamer, it's free to use.

FME – The underlying technology that drives the apps. This is the core technology and, just like a phone, you pay for it just once.



Splitting capability and capacity



DataFlow Player landing page

Adding value

When apps first arrived they came in the shape of small pieces of code to accomplish specific tasks. Even better, more people could access them. Today, it means that GIS managers can far more easily deliver services that consume much of their time and begin to add value by shifting their focus to solution creation.

That said, such a change doesn't just have to be internal. Sharing knowledge and best practise is at the core of DataFlow so regional GIS groups can start sharing their skills and leveraging each other's capabilities too.

Finally, and best of all, just as we have seen with phones and apps, the cost of data management solutions has just fallen through the floor.

Ben Allan is the Managing Director of miso (www.misoportal.com), the innovative trading division of Dotted Eyes Ltd