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Merging and segmenting of the geospatial market

Andy Beckerson ponders whether the combination of survey and mapping adds up to 'geospatial' in today's real world of data collection, processing and analysis

At KOREC we have always treated the disciplines of land survey and mapping/ GIS as two different markets with different accuracy requirements and different point code requirements, with the nesting of data specifically for the GIS market. More importantly, both markets have different customer groups, which is why we have serviced them with different sales consultants and support engineers.

Trimble's view is that survey and mapping combined make for 'geospatial', but does this stand up to the real world of data collection, processing and analysis that we see today in the UK?

In my experience there are very few, if any, traditional land survey companies that today collect GIS/mapping data. Indeed, most would struggle to find the manpower needed for mass data collection. It's this that drives the market to consider mobile scanning and imaging technologies for quick and efficient data collection. It can be achieved without experienced staff or the costs associated with putting 'Trainers on Tarmac' – something I covered in my last column.

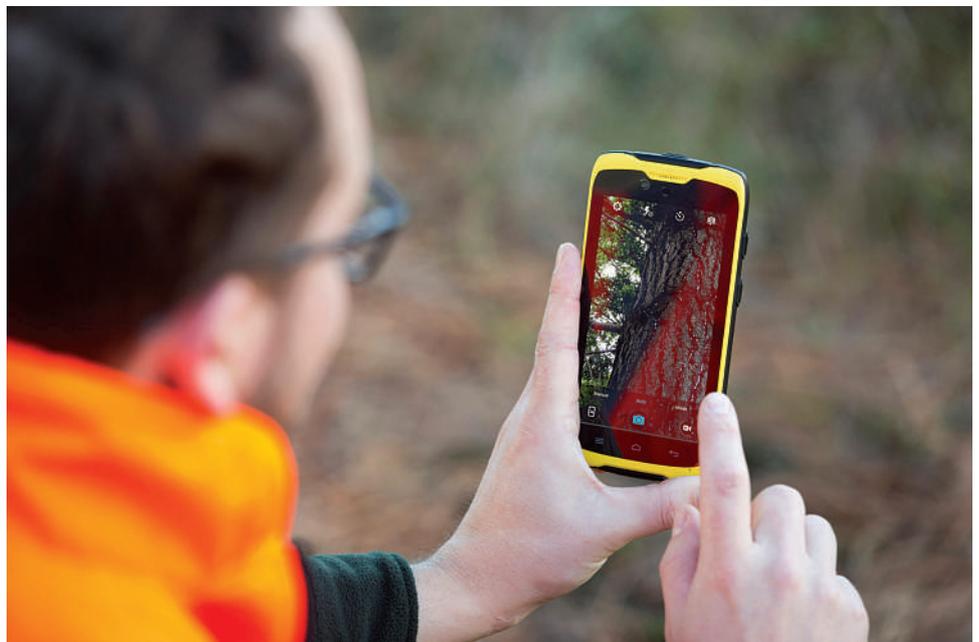
Changes afoot

However, changes are afoot whereby some of today's typical land survey customers could start buying into technology that replaces the requirement for a specialist surveyor. We have already seen this in policing and where road traffic accident investigators are using Total Stations, GNSS receivers, imaging technology and laser scanners, albeit in a highly specialised way, to gather, collate and analyse what actually happened, where and why. This 'erosion' of the surveyor's skills is driven by technology and it is starting to happen in other sectors, too.

With the accuracy of some GIS data collection devices and the availability of reliable network correction services, centimetre-level positional accuracy, good enough for many land survey applications, can now be made available at significantly lower costs than hitherto.

Hot property

Imagine the small property developer who needs a quick survey to see if a plot of land might meet his requirements. What is needed here is not a detailed engineering-type survey with accurate levels for drainage, but a 'could I get five or six houses on here?' type of survey, the sixth



Trimble's Android TDC100 with K-Mobile Android data capture software

house being the difference between developing the land or not.

Of course, the developer could refer to a Google Earth image, which may or may not be out-of-date, or he could consider a new option: as part of a site visit, he could extract from his pocket his dual purpose phone and data collection device, (the recently launched Trimble TDC100 combined Android GNSS Data Collector and Smartphone would be typical of the technology with on-board data collection software such as K-Mobile Android).

Thus equipped, he could collect the required survey information such as the boundary, drainage covers and site entrance and exit. There you have it! A non-geospatial professional conducting a site visit and survey to GIS-type accuracies ... something that, in the past, would have involved a land surveyor.

Now the question is, 'Is this the merging and segmentation of the market?' Seen from the land surveyor's perspective, maybe it is segmenting yet another small sector away from the surveyor, forcing him to explore new opportunities and technologies.

So perhaps we should look at the question from a different angle: maybe the geospatial market is evolving and changing to meet the demand for accurate positional information with relevant up-to-date descriptions of the positions collected, allowing the end user to make better business decisions. However, one thing is for certain; the market is growing exponentially and that's a bonus for us all.



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