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Time to reflect ... and look forward

As 2017 draws to a close, Chris Harris takes stock of current and future software developments in field data capture

The annual INTERGEO exhibition and conference in Germany is perhaps the best week of the year to see the geospatial community delivering innovation in abundance, and it was the turn of software to steal some of the headlines at this year's event in Berlin.

Data-rich sensors such as the Trimble SX10 Scanning Total Station are exciting to those who can make it sing and dance in the field. Yet that excitement can end abruptly in the office if the processing of data is clunky and you can't easily get what you want. Consequently, at this year's INTERGEO we saw more ways of getting to the end deliverable, more quickly, and using far richer information than ever before. I would say all major suppliers had a major refresh of their office geospatial software, making it easier for those seeking added flexibility, the ability to work with any data format, and all without the need for a super computer.

How about next year?

I don't think data exchange has yet reached its limit. Nowadays, moving files from the office onto an 'in the field' data logger is already easy. We can wirelessly sync them if we want and in a number of different formats. As mobile PCs and operating systems improve we will see more improved workflows with greater control throughout the process.

We are already seeing how software is moving from a highly technical to a more consumer-oriented look-and-feel, becoming an engaging and intuitive experience in the process. Office software will doubtless follow suit, provided it can retain the control and functionality required to get the job done. Data sharing will be more and more flexible, and more 'viewer' type applications will allow a third party to look at rich data and take basic measurements and notes, but without a need to host it themselves.

I believe we will also see a growth in automated processes and workflows that streamline data handling, reduce manual clicks, and cut the number of software packages

required to create a specified deliverable. Consequently, team members will be able to focus their efforts on meeting a client's most demanding needs, namely high-value services and deliverables undertaken in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Software is key

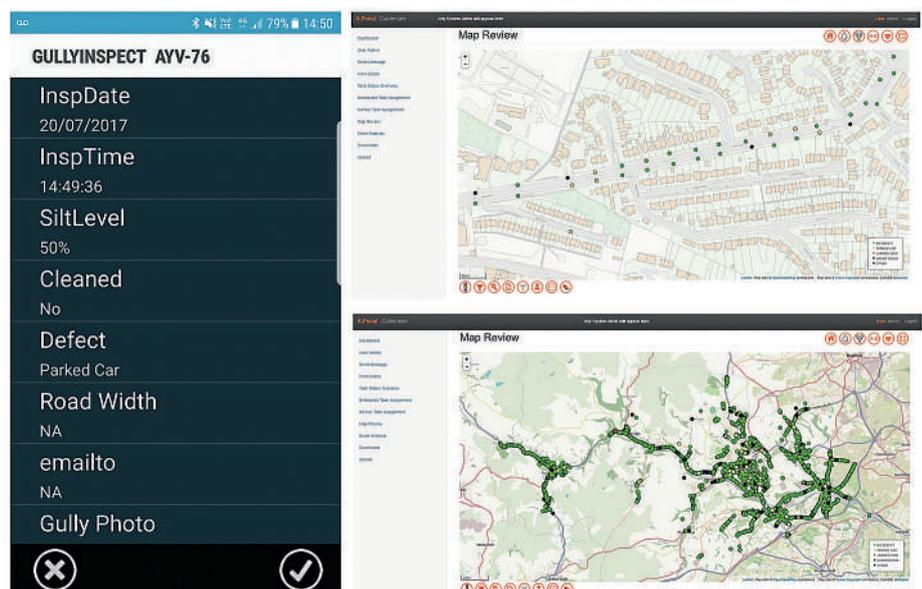
Software is key to this process and a vital part of an effective workflow. We are certainly seeing evidence of this trend at KOREC, with our in-house software development division receiving many requests to streamline application-specific workflows, particularly for field data capture.

Some of the developments we conduct on behalf of customers are tiny: we've recently been working in the forestry sector to take the headache out of measuring tree girth by developing a Bluetooth link between the measurement calipers and KOREC's K-Mobile data capture software running on a Trimble handheld. The end result is that a single click records the tree girth measurement and

wirelessly transmits the reading into a K-Mobile data entry field on the handheld. The whole process is now performed by a single field worker in seconds – simple but effective.

Some of our software projects are more complex. For example, we have been working with local authorities to develop a system for intelligence-based drainage maintenance (covered in a case study in the September/October issue of GeoConnexion). The end result, K-Gully, uses a field data collection app with which field engineers record the date, time and location of each gully being cleaned, as well as current silt levels and any reasons why a gully was not cleaned.

While these types of streamlined application-specific workflows deliver huge dividends to end users, one thing is for sure: with more hardware and software options than ever, the geospatial community is an exciting place to be. Hard to keep up with some might say? No way; it's just always worth doing a bit of research and speaking to suppliers!



Examples of customised data capture form (left) and interactive mapping on the K-Gully app