

FINDING YOUR NICHE



PROFESSIONAL SURVEYORS WILL CONTINUE TO THRIVE, DESPITE NEW TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

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I started covering the geospatial technology industry in 1996 for a magazine called *Mapping Awareness*. At the time, one of the burning issues was the arrival of affordable, easy to use desktop GIS and mapping software for the masses. Was this going to put professional GIS users out of a job? The arrival of the “world wide web” at more or less the same time only made that concern more pressing.

Twenty-five years later and those same concerns are with us, just in different areas of the industry. Now the ubiquity of GPS – something that in 1996 few had heard and which the US government had purposefully made too inaccurate for professional surveying without recourse to “differential GPS” – and other GNSS means surveyors themselves are wondering what will become of them when the masses have highly accurate location equipment wherever they go: their phones.

It’s a pressing concern, as evidenced by the fact this was one of the themes of our previous issue and is the cover story of this issue as well.

On page 24, Damien Schmitz presents another solution to this dilemma: what are surveyors useful for now? Just as amateur photographers abound and everyone now has a camera with them, yet professional photographers still have very successful careers, so surveyors need to find their niches, Schmitz argues.

“It’s like the difference between an expert photographer and an amateur photographer: knowing what to focus on – taking one perfect picture rather than 1,000 meaningless pictures – exposes the difference between the amateur generalist and the specialist, and demonstrates the value.”

Desktop GIS is still here and Google and Apple Maps are on everyone’s phones, of course, but professional GIS users still have jobs.

I’m very sure that professional surveyors will still have jobs in 25 years’ time, no matter what technology advancements take place. Hopefully, I’ll still be writing about them then!

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Cover: Just as professional photographers have had to find a niche, in an age when everyone has a camera in their pocket, so professional surveyors will have to adapt to the pervasiveness of amateur surveyors with GNSS-enabled smartphones (page 24)

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