

WHAT'S THAT WHEN IT'S AT HOME?

THE PANDEMIC IS CAUSING US TO AVOID THE DAILY COMMUTE, MEANING DIGITAL MARKETING WILL STRUGGLE TO TARGET US – UNTIL FLOC ARRIVES, SAYS **ALISTAIR MACLENAN**

The geospatial industry is horizontal – it has applications across every other industry, rather than being its own industry. And the number of those applications is increasing like a mathematical thought experiment involving rabbits.

Now, due to the combination of the rise of the online meeting brought on by the pandemic and a 16-month-old blog post from Google, I wonder if we might see that number rise yet higher.

Bloody rabbits.

It would be difficult for anyone not to have noticed that the way we work has changed. Two years ago, most people would have guessed that the word 'furlough' had something to do with how far horses run. But today, offices are as endangered as the black rhino.

Whilst some of the old ways will return, it feels unlikely that people will rush back to an arduous five-day commute to an office. When they can sit at home. In their pyjamas.

This change was always coming, but like the nervous child who needs a push into the swimming pool, the pandemic gave us a nudge and those who could, dived into home working.

The technology works. We can host nearly all meetings online.

And this presents everyone trying to sell

things to other people to be successful (note, this is not the only business model available in our unusual modern world) with a thorny, geographical-based marketing problem: where are your prospective customers?

Home addresses are not something people share lightly.

Office address? Fine, have it but you're not coming up my driveway with your glossy LiDAR data brochures!

'Easy!' I hear you cry (note, not because I am on your driveway). 'We will use digital marketing to reach them, based upon what other geo-stuff they like seeing.'

And that is where last year's Google blog post comes in.

Since dear reader, I know that you digest every word of those cookie warnings before clicking "I accept", I hardly need to explain that the websites you visit write a little code to your machine that allows for the future communication of your online behaviour.

Well, not for much longer.

Google, the internet's gatekeeper, has announced that its browser, Chrome, will no longer support third-party cookies in 2022.

Like homeworking, this has been a long time coming. Apple has already announced a future iOS update that will require users to give permission before apps can collect users' data and the rise of ad-

blocking technology has been inexorable.

So, if we don't know where our prospective customers are in the world and we can't track their behaviour online, how can we efficiently and successfully market our life-changing geo-tech to them?

Well, just like last's month column looked at the rise of BIM (modelling the built environment), marketing is also embracing models.

Hasn't it always?

Well in this case, Google's replacement offering for blocking third-party cookies is the hilariously titled Federated Learning of Cohorts (FLoC). Or, if you prefer it in English – modelling the behaviour of groups of people, not individuals.

Soon, all we may know is roughly where people are and sort of what they're doing.

Could geospatial be the solution? Could people finally opt into mobile, location-based advertising as a way of staying in tight control of their inbound messages and their location?

Or will a dispersed population see the rise of one of the oldest geospatial marketing applications: the billboard!

Only time and place will tell.

Alistair MacLenan is founder of the geospatial B2B marketing agency Quarry One Eleven (www.quarry-one-eleven.com)

