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THOSE PESKY DEFINITIONS AGAIN

PLEASE DEFINE THE 'GEOMATICS' MARKET FOR ME,
THANK YOU!

Maybe it is a year-end thing with press companies, but I get an inordinate number of calls with the question "What is your view on where the geomatics industry is going in 2010...?" My first response – OK, my second response, after an internalised groan – is "What geomatics industry are you referring to?" (forgive the poor grammar, I claim editor's privilege). This usually stumps the caller. "Well, you know, the geomatics industry!" I reply, with some patience, in my opinion, "Yes, but what part of the geomatics industry?" At this point, some callers simply give up, branding me as an idiot who doesn't know what the 'geomatics industry' is and wondering how I ever got to be editor of a major geomatics trade journal.

First, I might point out that being editor of a 'geomatics industry' trade journal exposes me to far more sectors of that industry and all things 'geo' than the average PR consultant will ever know. Also, my non-editorial life includes work as a consultant for 15 years in developing spatial data infrastructures, globally. This permits me to see not only how diverse the 'geomatics' industry is, but also how more diverse, and at the same time convergent, it is becoming. Surely that is not possible? Read on.

The moment that focus shifted from 'geographic information' towards 'location' for many main actors in the industry, products and services changed as well. Survey technology companies no longer simply produce superb surveying machines, but imbue them with GIS packages, location-aware cameras, GSM/broadband communications, and the ability to use GPS for centimetre or millimetre accuracy. In other words, advances in several other technology sectors, many of which have nothing to do with 'geo' specifically, now drive new developments for survey technology.

The remote sensing 'industry' comprises myriad sensor developers, suitable for all land, sea and air environments, employing quite disparate technologies, development of advanced aerial and space platforms, new communications protocols, and whole new sub-industries specialising in image analysis

and data collection software and networks. But then is 'image analysis' part of the geomatics industry? Or not, since many of the tools used derive from non-geo applications and expertise, and from players not considered to be 'geo', which are now simply put to 'geo' image analysis for the first time.

Is there a 'data collection' sector to our industry? Remote sensing alone spans *in situ* sensors, evolving sensor webs, aerial and space platforms. But that sector should also include handheld data collectors, which today include even smart phones - now being used to collect georeferenced images of built infrastructure in a number of projects – often by ordinary citizens (crowd sourcing or VGI). Is laser scanning technology part of 'data collection' or a form of 'remote sensing' – or a sector of its own? When laser scanning is employed to capture 'scene of crime or accident' point clouds, as opposed to simply 3D building outlines, does that make it more 'geo'?

GIS is now mainstream and multifaceted as a result of the Internet – enterprise and desktop are no longer good enough. Now you must be able to find, collect (download), process and redistribute spatial information across the web – often without even having the processing software on your own computer. So where does the 'GIS industry' start and end? With ESRI, Intergraph, Autodesk, Cadcorp and the other traditional vendors – or location intelligence specialists like Pitney Bowes Business Insight (MapInfo, as was) or utilities specialists like Bentley? Or do we now include Google and Microsoft's spatially aware applications, as well?

In the end, I usually suggest that my callers invest thousands of dollars in purchasing the latest "geo" related market studies from the experts at Daratech, Frost & Sullivan or Gartner Group - that usually ends the discussion. Enjoy 2010, whatever sector of the 'geomatics industry' applies to you!