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Utilities and GIS

With autumn now definitely here and Winter approaching, in the midst of a major economic downturn, there's some surprisingly good news for the GIS industry. Recent studies on the industry suggest that the worldwide market for Geospatial Information Systems could grow as much as 50% over the next five years which is compound annual growth in excess of 9%. Although there is a forecast slowdown in 2009 to 1%, down from 11% in 2008 and a huge 17.4% in 2007 there appears to be a general view that the high annual growth rate of the past few years would return in 2010 (See the Executive Suite page 40 in this issue).

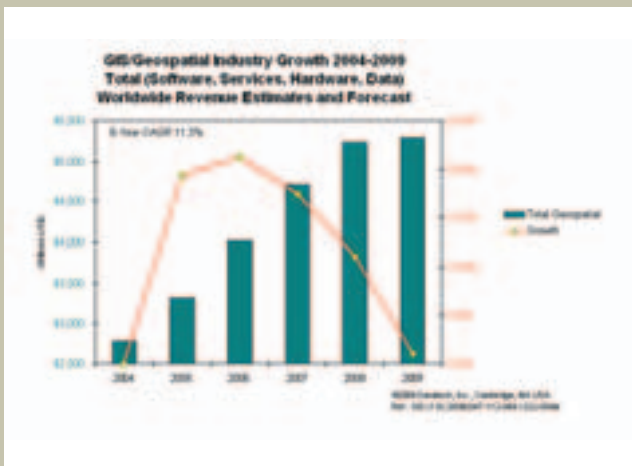
It is expected that the growth will be driven in main by utilities which tend to be "non-cyclical" in that their own performance tends to be less affected by the general economy. After all we all need heating in the winter and light and water all year round. In later years, it is likely that increasing GIS activity will come from emerging markets in Asia and Latin America and then, once out of the recession, Europe and North America.

Utilities are obvious users of GIS given the enormous geographic spread of their assets and the challenges in managing them. Accurate location, especially of underground assets is something the industry has been focusing on and with the general improvements in technology (very high data volume handling, fast servers, larger networks, grid computing and so on) and the general move towards "smart grids" it is easy to see why utilities will be a key area.

We posed our Big Question to the industry this month addressing the issue of Data within utility companies and it looks like even from the few responses collected – but probably representative - utilities as a whole really must focus on their data and invest heavily on capture, and maintenance.

Another factor to be considered, although not coming through strongly from the industry responses, is the ability of utilities to share data (see Steven Rixon's answer).

In this issue we have presented two topics that we hope might contribute towards these goals and provide elements for some useful brainstorming: a web based information service for utilities and Spatial Data Infrastructure that looks set to arrive into the UK at last!



Learning from the geological record

Photo by Adrian Palmer
www.rhul.ac.uk/

Very little was previously known about the speed of formation of ancient lochs at Glen Roy in Scotland, which were formed during the last Ice Age from glacial ice. Professor Lowe, of the Geography Department of Royal Holloway, argues that research is important to understanding past and future environmental change. "Our past records show ample evidence of the astounding frequency and abruptness with which Scotland's climate is capable of change. The big question is what that history can inform us about the nature of climate changes to come."

Airwave's Award

Successful delivery of Airwave to the London Underground has resulted in a prestigious national award. The Sir Robert Horton Award for Safety was presented at the National Rail Awards to Airwave and its partners Thales, London Underground, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA), Motorola and Citylink Telecommunications. It recognised the delivery of Airwave – on budget and more than three months ahead of schedule – to every sub-surface London Underground station and tunnel section. The project brought significant safety and security benefits as emergency services can use Airwave on the tube, further enhancing the safety of the travelling public. www.airwavesolutions.co.uk

Brent chooses UKMap

After announcing pricing at the AGI GeoCommunity Conference, Brent Council, London, has become the UK's first public authority to implement UKMap®, published by The GeoInformation Group. Brent Council signed up to a corporate licence for a three-year term to provide key location and base map data. Cost savings have already been identified in the first year. Brent Council plans to incorporate the location information to enhance public services via the internet. It will also use UKMap in place of Ordnance Survey for a number of key applications such as internal planning applications and traffic management orders. www.theukmap.co.uk Read full story at www.geoconnexion.com/geouk_articles.php

Edinburgh Festival Mapped

Visitors to this year's Edinburgh Festivals including the Fringe were able to locate the numerous venues for the thousands of events with a new map based on the People's Map of Edinburgh. The map produced by the Festival Fringe Society was available stand alone on A3 and also bound into the Official Guide to the Fringe. People's Map enables map makers to create their own styles and then add data relevant to specific use. The A3 map features locations for all the main Festival venues as well as a wide variety of other tourist attractions and bus and rail routes. The smaller map provides information specific to the Fringe. www.peoplesmap.com