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As austerity bites

Looking for some post-Christmas cheer in these straitened economic times? Mike Saunt recaptures the festive spirit with some money-saving suggestions

A while back, I was walking to work with one of my neighbours who works in IT at the Home Office. He was talking about a conference that he had been to the week before. Francis Maude, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, had given a presentation and had explained the cuts that had just been made were only the beginning and that there were a few more years to go.

In late November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave his Autumn Statement... pretty depressing stuff, I'm sure you'll agree. I won't focus on the political side of things but one thing's clear: the austerity measures will NOT finish by 2014 but will need to continue until at least 2016. Depressing I know, but what to do about it?

Glad you asked.

First, we can't afford to do the things we do today in the same way in the future – some things need to change. But as you are probably aware, things are already changing. For example, what was once a new-fangled spatial database that cost £10,000's to install and then £1,000's per year PER CORE to license and maintain is now just a commodity, just waiting to save you money. In fact, I've got a post-Christmas list of real money savers for you – and your boss will thank you too!

Database technologies

Years ago, there was only one player in town, but boy did it cost! Costs associated with maintenance alone were pretty scary. Many would then

also need some middleware to allow their GIS to access it, which incurred even more cost and the dreaded data lock-in. Most databases now support 'Spatial' and the best functioning, with amazing value, is PostgreSQL with the PostGIS extension. No ifs or buts. Indeed, working closely with our clients, we've built some load balanced and clustered instances that really fly. Sprinkle some magic Christmas dust in the form of Clustered Indexes and you've got national MasterMap or Vector Map Local coming out with sub-second response times.

People often worry about set up and support – no worries, and two things to note: minimal DBA skills are required and I know a company (cough, cough) that offers Enterprise support if needed.

Also, don't forget that with no Software Tax if you get more usage than you expected and need to turn it up to 11, it's completely scalable without financial burdens.

Ordnance Survey data translators

Back in the early 2000's (or was it before that?) when the Ordnance Survey launched DNF / MasterMap in GML format, it was all very new. With 'new' comes complexity in building software to support new formats and ways of doing things, but the early translators did a great job. With the success of GML some of the early companies have successfully opened new doors to new industries (hat tip to Snowflake) and the Open Source world now supports GML too. Try typing 'OSMMLoader' into Google... at the top of the list you'll find a free (source code included) translator that has been



The screenshot shows the GitHub repository page for 'AstunTechnology/osmmloader'. The repository is described as a 'Simple OS MasterMap loader written in Python using OGR'. It includes a table of commit history with columns for author, date, and message. Below the commit history, there is a 'readme.markdown' section with the following content:

Simple OS MasterMap GML/GZ loader
 Author: Matt Walker, Astun Technology Ltd.
 Contact: support@astuntechnology.com
 A very simple OS MasterMap loader written in Python that makes use of OGR 1.8. Source data can be in OML or GZ (gz) format and can be output to any of the formats supported by OGR.
Dependencies
 - OGR 1.8
 - OGR is part of the GDAL, set of tools for translating and manipulating geospatial data.

Surprise, surprise!



Loading OS OpenData and OS MasterMap into PostgreSQL/PostGIS using OGR and the Astun Technology OS MasterMap loader

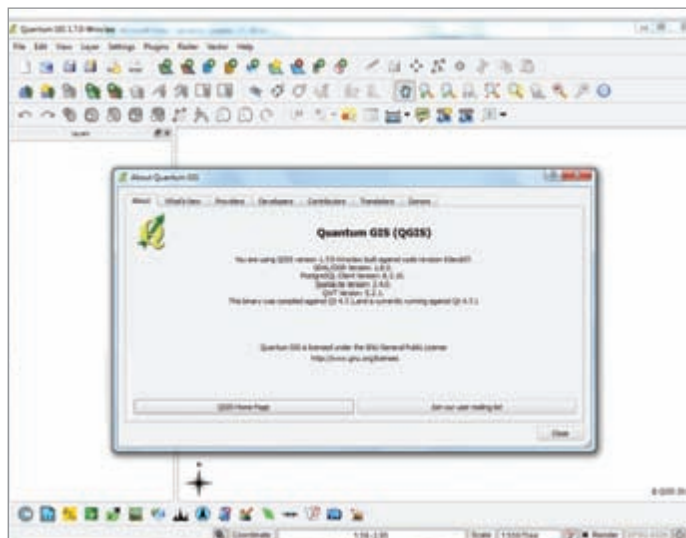
through national coverage of both MasterMap and Vector Map Local without a hitch.

PS – there’s an Oracle Loader, too, and if you are looking to go to PostGIS – you could be saving even more...

Another prezzie - desktop GIS

Last year I wrote an article stating that I thought proprietary desktop GIS still had about five years before Open Source stood a chance of catching up. I was wrong – take a look at Quantum GIS 1.7 (QGIS) – it is awesome. Unless you are a real ‘hardcore’ GIS analyst I think that QGIS can meet many of your requirements. I have a couple of clients who have started deploying it with great feedback from their users.

Traditional web-based intranet GIS mapping solutions can help to drastically reduce the number of licences – just don’t get caught out



Quantum 1.7: awesome

with per core or CPU licensing costs as this is, in effect, a software tax on your success!

And last but not least - Server based GIS

MapServer, GeoServer – enough said really.

Now with all these, there may be a little work needed to effect the transition, but that’s what life is about and keeps you on your toes. I know many people who have started the transition and are already saving £10,000’s per year. On top of this, they are learning and feeling empowered because they have access to software that they can understand and control and that is really much more than something that came out of a box at Christmas!

I try to avoid plugging specifically what my company does but well, it was Christmas...

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