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Public sector derived data conundrum

Let's sort it out ...here is a challenge!

How did this start?

I've just pulled off the M40 motorway into a service station on my way back from a conference in Manchester, a Web 2.0 event for Local Government. I was the only mapping person attending and gave a presentation with live data mash-ups. Whilst touching on the Power of Information Task Force I mentioned how the recent budget revealed that the restrictive practices of the Ordnance Survey had to change.

I don't think the resulting OS Strategy does the trick, although it is still too early to tell, so I have a new initiative to discuss with you – a revised Ordnance Survey derived data licensing model.

Software and Data licensing is stifling innovation...

A few people came up to me at the conference, here are a few examples of conversations I had:

"We want to put maps etc online but our GIS department have said that we can only use this 'Arc thing' as that is where the data is and it will cost between £30-40,000 to do it."

POW! First punch to a software proprietary data format lock-in scenario (I advised them that an Open Source solution could access and extract this data)

Q. *"I'm setting up a tourism site www.insertcouncilnamehere.co.uk. We don't have online mapping and I want to use Google Maps but I've been told by my GIS team we can't put our tourist attraction and public information points on there as they are considered to be 'derived data' from OS maps."*

POW! Another punch, this time to a monopoly vendor data lock-in (I advised them that as they probably have less than 100 points it would be possible to re-digitize from a different backdrop i.e. aerial photography avoiding the derived data issue)

Q. *"If we used your software would there be any other data costs?"*

A. *"Yes, if you use an address search you'll need to pay an additional £3,000 or 1p per click – even though it is more expensive than using commercial services from the likes of Microsoft"*

Q. *"Really, even though we maintain an LLPG?"*

POW! Second punch to the monopoly vendor data lock-in with the additional Royal Mail monopoly twist (*Unfortunately there is no get out of jail free card for this one at the moment*)

Q. *"I'd like our web team to put out some simple GeoRSS feeds. Would we be breaking the OS derived data restrictions?"*

A. *"I guess if you have the relevant copyright notice and comply with OS T&C's like Natural England have done you'd be covered but not being a lawyer and I don't really know. Why don't you check with the OS?"*

Q. *"If I go to the OS they will probably just say no!" (mmm – no comment)*

KA-BOOM! Out for the count. The customer is locked in with the monopoly data vendor but relations have got that bad that they aren't ask.

Well this certainly got me thinking whilst I was driving and I had to pull over to check my pocket because I had the feeling someone had stolen my wallet!

I'm a software supplier so what do I care?

The government has just released its budget and are saying things like more 'collective buying power', 'greater commercialisation of the OS' etc. I'm a software supplier so it shouldn't affect me too much... but it does. It is hindering business in general.

Here is the deal.

This goes way beyond GIS and it is stifling Local Government's ability to innovate to the point where Webbies (web managers) can't provide what they want as a public service to citizens because of restrictive licensing - think about the tourist attractions above. This data could never be considered to be the Crown Jewels, but that is how it is being treated.

There has been progress but no real and meaningful proposal on how to fix this and certainly without the input from the people on the ground who it affects most.

I think that collectively we should up the ante and I have a plan, if any one is interested, on how to do just that, it's called the: - 'Open Mapping Initiative for Government Only Derived Data' (OMIGODD) – the name may change but the goal won't! This is more than an e-petition that you might post at Number10.gov.uk as we're going to pull together a realistic proposal that will not impact the Ordnance Survey's business but will promote innovation and re-use of public sector data using the input and backing from 1000's of users. If you want to find out how and get involved read the full article on http://www.geoconnexion.com/burning_issue_uk.php.



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