



Location: the hidden 'integrator'

Peter Beaumont, a NAVTEQ Director, looks at the rise of location as the key to data accessibility and integration

Location has always been considered fundamental to many business decisions but typically only when using classic geomarketing analysis to identify optimum locations for particular businesses. But that picture has changed dramatically – to the extent that location is now often the hidden 'key' or 'integrator' enabling data accessibility and integration throughout the entire organisation.

So which factors have caused this turnaround? Firstly, the awareness and use of location in day to day life has never been higher or more visible than it is today. Location or location-enabled devices and applications are becoming omnipresent – we see them in television advertisements for navigation solutions, newspaper articles focusing on LBS, on roadside billboards heralding the latest location enabled mobile phones and on internet search engines.

The phenomenal rise of satellite navigation, in both consumer and business communities, combined with the growth of local search on the internet, has given rise to a new 'location expectant' society. Imagine your favourite search engine not providing access to mapping on demand or not being able to find a map or make a local search from your mobile phone?

This new awareness has certainly impacted attitudes towards using location in business and there is a growing understanding that it is not just about physical bricks and mortar. Our experience demonstrates two areas are currently showing particularly significant growth - the application of location as part of business intelligence and the acceptance and take up of location based web services.

For example most leading databases now offer spatial extensions and the top business intelligence software vendors are adding location based visualisation and analysis to their product portfolios. Indeed we are even starting to see specialist consultancies purely providing services and solutions for location based business intelligence.

The uptake of geo-related intelligence is likely to lead to more advanced use of location data and further integration of applications, ultimately leading to a truly location integrated enterprise.

Wider availability of standardised web services

The second important driver has been the wider availability (and user acceptance) of digital maps and associated location analysis and visualisation tools

via industry standardised web services. Until relatively recently, potential customers would often respond to the promotion of hosted web based location applications with concerns about security, reliability and performance. Although still a concern for some mission critical or sensitive applications, user acceptance of the internet, and in particular the use of software as a service, has patently increased. Many businesses no longer want the cost of installing, maintaining and updating software or loading and updating DVDs full of data.

Although there are still some challenges that the industry needs to meet, these are small compared to the major challenge of changing attitudes and perceptions which has already been overcome. Years or even decades of GI / GIS evangelism have been instrumental in raising the awareness of the benefits that location can bring to both business and society.

As a data supplier, NAVTEQ works to ensure that its mapping is as up to date as possible and delivered to customers in the most efficient formats, whether via DVD or through web services. Pricing models are changing to reflect the changes in use. In many cases, where free application access is expected, there are clear, proven advertising based models now emerging as suitable alternatives to the traditional GIS-based pricing models. Technology suppliers are also further developing their tools to improve user interaction and performance.

Confidence leads to growth

This growth in popularity of location demonstrates that IT professionals are becoming more confident about the reliability of services and the business decision makers are becoming more confident in the value of location and can develop clear business cases for investment. Together these changes in attitude make it much easier to integrate location data and analysis into mainstream enterprise applications and I am sure will, in turn, lead to even more widespread use.

The science fiction of only a few years ago is now a reality. This is what makes our industry very exciting and dynamic as more and more applications deliver clear business and societal benefits.

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