

Collecting and Managing Big Data Brings Responsibilities



The mantra that “data is king” was instilled into me when I was a relatively new (and young) surveyor. Nowadays data is still a prime focus, but its volume is such that “big data” is now considered normal and is sometimes masking the importance of the characteristics, continuity and integrity of the data itself. Data from remote platforms and space featured in this issue is a prime example of increasing data volumes.

Data is now considered to be a valuable key commodity of the world’s largest traded companies. It is said to be replacing oil as the major commodity for new business innovation and new enterprises. The comparison to oil is interesting for us who deal with geospatial data and provide geomatics expertise to that industry. Oil is generally a single use item and operates in a steady and perhaps even slow way. Data, on the other hand, is fast evolving and re-useable and of potentially unlimited supply. In addition, data is controlled by a much broader group than oil which in some senses means the crowd control it. Geomatics is an enabler for and the engine of, oh so many, other spatial data based uses and location applications. We are in a period where the data is gaining ever-increasing numbers and types of users who may ultimately determine the future use and importance of our spatial data.

Regulation is Important!

Whilst we innovate and develop uses for the increasing amount of data we collect, technology is enabling us to gain greater access and potentially greater control. However, with this comes a security issue. Data privacy is now a major concern for many and the EU is introducing the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), www.eugdpr.org. The Regulation aims to improve data privacy and protection by extending jurisdiction of the GDPR to all companies processing the personal data of subjects residing in the Union, regardless of the company’s location. The GDPR has introduced penalties that can be as much as 4% of a company’s global annual turnover and also there are strengthened conditions relating to consent. It is important to understand that not all geospatial data is personal data and GDPR is very relevant to the geomatics profession so it’s important to correctly identify such data. Data that is personalised or has certain attributes included with it will be subject to the new regulations. So maintaining anonymity with such data may not be too straightforward, but at least we, as spatial data professionals, understand the location and position component that accounts for over 75% of all information and for many of our clients nearer 90%.

A data breach must be reported immediately to avoid penalties, however, the potential danger of a breach is now not only a significant fine but potentially a much more devastating debilitation of your organisation, company or other prime IT network. Take last year’s NotPetya cyber attacks on various global businesses and organisations. This was virtually an extinction level event for several very large multinationals. Those of us who are collecting, processing and delivering geospatial data must be under no illusion that this new data rich environment we enjoy has it’s darker side. Spatial integrity must be matched with data integrity which of course is nothing new for us, but its context within big data and data mining means we can provide specialist insight and services across the developing and to date, not fully regulated, data domains.

GeoBusiness & FIG

This May the FIG Congress will be held in Istanbul with the theme “Embracing our Smart World Where Continents Connect”. The other key event in May is GeoBusiness 2018 which this year includes a new format seminar with thought-provoking sessions and presentations that illustrate the impact geospatial technologies and innovative solutions are having on our global environment. Both these events aim to promote and include the younger professionals and students who we hope will come to represent us in the future and enable our profession to continue to develop new technologies, techniques and to sustain the “data is king” mantra.

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