

Future Forecast

It's a fine tradition around this time of the year: trying to identify what the hot topics will be in the coming year. Many magazines and television shows are looking back on the past year and at the same time trying to catch a glimpse of the future. Lists of what is 'in' and what is 'out', or what's 'hot or not', are appearing not only in the glossies, but also in more serious, technically oriented magazines. It would be interesting to keep track of which of the forecasts came true, but that is something that can only be done in early 2013. For now, I would like to try and name a few of the trends I think will be dominating our industry in 2012. The first one, specific to the geoindustry, is the concept of 'business to consumer'. It has become a buzz word in recent months, and many software companies have already introduced geoinformation-related apps for consumers. One to watch! Another trend geomatics professionals should take into account is the 'cloud'; the cloud offers plenty of new applications and a lot of efficiency in terms of both storage capacity and ways to work with data, so I expect it to have a significant impact on our work in the coming year. A further trend, which relates to business in general rather than the geosector specifically but nonetheless will have a huge effect, is the 'level playing field'. With various regions across the world facing economic challenges and currency crises, I believe that the playing field in the global marketplace is levelling out. We are seeing higher wages in emerging markets such as China, Brazil and India and lower wages in the United States and Europe. Meanwhile, prices and established techniques are under pressure, attracting new entrants which thus leads to even more pressure. As a result, the differences between the markets are disappearing and a truly global market is on the horizon. Lower profit rates are becoming the norm, and company leaders, in particular of those companies listed on the stock exchange, are having to persuade their shareholders to have more realistic expectations. The years of unlimited growth seem to be over for the foreseeable future. The final trend I would like to mention is 'online'. The internet, and more specifically social media, is ironing out differences between, and creating more ways to communicate with, customers. It is becoming difficult to hide; there will always be customers saying something - good or bad - about you on Twitter or Facebook. Companies will have to find ways to deal with this and try to be as honest as possible, in both their real-life and online presence, in order not to create unrealistic expectations. If you don't already have one, the best advice I can give you is to devise an online strategy for 2012.

Let me end this last editorial of 2011 by saying that this year held some unexpected developments for me, and the same can probably be said for you. The only thing that is certain is that the same will be true for 2012. I am all too aware of - and ultimately thankful for - the fact that we cannot gaze into the crystal ball. My forecasts are virtually worthless; they can at best be used for entertainment and learning. Therefore I sincerely hope that my wishes for the readers of *GIM International* and members of the geomatics community are worth more than my forecasts: may I wish health and prosperity to you all for the year ahead!