

COMMUNICATION KEY CHALLENGE FOR NEAR FUTURE

Geospatial World: the World <i>Is</i> Geospatial

In the vibrant city of San Francisco 1,250 professionals from 56 countries joined the 2005 edition of Intergraph's user conference Geospatial World, held from 25th to 28th April. This year's event drew more attendees than ever and provided many opportunities to look at the future of geospatial.

More attendees every year – this means that the conference and technical programmes must appeal to visitors. And indeed, enthusiastic and dynamic conversations filled the whole of the Hilton Hotel during Geospatial World, a name that is itself almost becoming a trademark. Participants were able to update their knowledge by attending more than two hundred technical sessions, lectures, hands-on workshops, demos, plenary sessions and keynote addresses. There were also social and networking events and, of course, the welcoming reception and a boat trip in San Francisco Bay.

Seamless

Halsey Wise, chief executive officer and president of Intergraph opened the conference by affirming that Intergraph was "more relevant than ever." Next, Preetha Pulusani, president of Intergraph Mapping & Geospatial Solutions told her audience that the company wanted to be an "open geospatial enterprise" with emphasis on the geospatial "because we are past GIS." Art Spencer, executive vice-president of Intergraph Mapping & Geospatial Solutions fired the audience with numerous examples of situations all over the world where Intergraph was of help with seamless solutions. One concerned the funeral of Pope John Paul II in Rome a few months ago, where Intergraph provided a "seamless solution" for handling calamities in the crowded streets of Rome during those hectic days. Another example was the supply of "seamless solutions" to the municipality of Washington, DC for the inauguration of President Bush in January 2005.

Uncertainty Factor

Business is growing for Intergraph. Halsey Wise put it like this: "Look at the newspapers: no day goes by without stories about security concerns or high energy prices on the front page. Stories that illustrate the need for geospatial solutions." Intergraph used the conference to introduce G/Technology version 9.3 and GeoMedia 6.0, and technical sessions wherein users could get acquainted with new versions of Geomedia and GT/Technology were jam-packed. Also drawing the crowds were sessions on topics like "Photogrammetry Goes GIS" or "Maintaining New Jersey TRANSIT's Bus Network".

On Wednesday morning, president and co-founder of Boston, Massachusetts-based Delphi Group Thomas Koulopoulos shook up the audience with an inspiring keynote address in which he posited the idea at we were living in an era of "innovation deficit". According to Koulopoulos there were too few innovations in business these days because of an inability to integrate all the information currently available. He showed a slide with the desktop of an average Windows user, challenging his audience: "We don't even know how to integrate all the information on our desktop; how are we supposed to manage information in the real world?" A second factor changing business was, he said, that of "uncertainty" about outcomes of decision making, and this was linked to the same inability to integrate all the information of modern times. According to Koulopoulos, integration of information and the uncertainty factor were handled reasonably well by Intergraph by its producing seamless geospatial solutions and focusing on core business.

Road and Boat Trips

Although the venue was perfect for this event, many attendees grasped the chance to enjoy outings such as the road trips organised by Intergraph and its partner and supplier of digital data and maps, NavTeq. Two NavTeq field analysts, during a tour through San Francisco, showed how data of every street is collected monthly by making two pictures every second and writing down every change in, for example, ethnic colour of a restaurant, or obligatory driving direction and new ramps or roundabouts. NavTeq employs around 350 field analysts who collect data all over Europe and North America. The scheduled road trips were fully booked weeks ahead; even in geospatial circles there is still curiosity about day-to-day data collection. And in a city surrounded by water another sort of trip was inevitable: on Wednesday night it was time for the waves, with bands playing onboard, good food and even a chance for some gambling - but most important, great views of the city, the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz Island.

Leading-edge Customers

Back to business, David Holmes, director of Worldwide Product Strategies with Intergraph Mapping & Geospatial Solutions told conference that he was always looking for a certain sort of customer: "You need leading-edge customers, risk tolerant, that pose new questions that lead to new products. We listen very carefully to our customers and that is why we are able to create answers to their questions. Answers we are now translating into general solutions for all our customers." Preetha Pulusani added, "We are working with solution centres; these

centres consist of a few Intergraph workers from offices all over the world. They are all dealing with the same questions and are intercommunicating on them all the time. That way we are making full use of our experience and expertise all over the world." The biggest challenge for Intergraph's business right now was to conquer Asian Pacific and Chinese markets. The former East block also remained a bit of a terra incognita. "But we are working hard to gain the new markets for new products like Geomedia 6.0." Responding to the question of what presented the biggest challenge for Intergraph technologists in the near future, Preetha Pulusani smiled: "Communication! I started as a software developer myself. When I made my first terrain model I did it completely on my own. Geospatial technology now needs to fit into the existing IT-structures, so yes, communication is very important!" Communication is at least one thing that Geospatial World lacked not at all this year. As part of such a vibrant entourage people had the chance to speak to each other, listen and learn from each other: key words in communication. Till next year!

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