

INTERVIEW WITH PETER HEDLUND, ORDNANCE SURVEY INTERNATIONAL

Growing Geospatial Capabilities All over the World



Ordnance Survey International (OSI) is a subsidiary of Ordnance Survey (OS), responsible for sharing the British mapping agency's expertise and tradecraft with countries across the globe. In 2016, the international branch appointed Peter Hedlund as its new managing director. Back then, Hedlund stated that location data often reveals the simplest answers to many of our world's most complex questions. In this interview, he zooms in on the geospatial services his organisation provides all over the world.

What attracted you to join OS? And how does your past experience help you in this position?

Ordnance Survey (OS) is well-known and respected the world over; it has an excellent reputation. Geospatial data underpins an increasing number of people, businesses and governments, so it's currently an exciting time for OS and the overall geospatial community. With the emergence of technologies that have the potential to transform our world and the way we live and do business, we are on the verge of something really special. I have been living and working overseas for many years now. My career is technology-focused and my roles have always been to grow teams and businesses across markets and regions. I've worked with small nimble start-ups, as well as large corporations. In general, my experience has been about leading teams, and inspiring people to be innovative and come up with good products and solutions that solve client issues in a clever and efficient way.

How have OS's international activities evolved over the years?

Almost 20 years ago now, OS made the strategic decision to withdraw from international work and concentrate all its efforts on digitising Great Britain's geospatial database – a massive task in those days! This activity was a world first, and the process took around 15 years to complete. Today, Great Britain has 'one true digital source' for all its geospatial information to operate from and which other government agencies and businesses can confidently use. The digital process enables better decision-making and helps things to happen in Great Britain quickly and with great efficiency. The experience gained from that process has been invaluable, as have the knowledge and skills that have also been amassed, and this supports the international consulting work which we are now doing. We have a lot to offer!

Which particular opportunities do you see for OS's skillset and experience to make a difference globally?

We are taking what we have done for Great Britain to other governments and their national mapping and cadastral agencies, to help them improve what they do and also to provide them with the tools to become more efficient and to make better decisions. We have done a lot of work internationally involving creating strategies and frameworks, data management, data modelling and spatial data infrastructure. Our approach is customer focused and entrepreneurial, and the offering is always expanding as we continue collaborating on groundbreaking smart city, IoT, connected and autonomous vehicle (CAV) and 5G-related projects. It is interesting, because many of these projects are becoming the catalyst for geospatial data.

How would you describe the ideal customer for OSI, and what exactly does OSI offer them?

We are open to any nation that has a need or a problem we can help with. The nation would need to have a clear vision of what it is they want to achieve and be open to learning about the importance of geospatial – if they don't already know – and how it can benefit government, business and citizens. What we offer is very specific geospatial consulting services, and we can broaden that to data capture services and project management services. We are here to enable, to transfer our knowledge and to teach about production capability. Various independent research papers have shown that not only can very large savings be achieved through usage of geospatial data, but also that the spatial information industry and its accumulated impacts are valued at between 0.2 and 0.6% of a country's GDP per annum. So obviously, there are some really large economic benefits to leveraging and using geospatial data.

What type of projects has OSI undertaken recently?

In the past six months OS has won contracts on four continents. The focus of this work has predominantly been on smart cities, climate change, data management, data modelling and improving the capacity of other nations. We are guiding them towards building, maintaining and running a geospatial framework that supports their communities, which creates better government and economic growth.

Which human resources does OSI have at its disposal?

We have a thousand people within OS who are specialised in geospatial consulting and data, and they are based in various locations. In addition to this, we have a huge network of very innovative partners that work with our data and technology and who we also leverage when we deliver on projects.

What role does OS play in UN-GGIM and how does this support the UK's geospatial activities?

From 2011-2015, the UK held one of the co-chair positions within the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and has helped to establish, grow, shape and develop the Committee of Experts into its current form. Aside from the co-chair position, OS has led the UK delegation to each of the Committee of Expert meetings, and ensures that a balanced delegation attends the meetings. The most recent delegation comprised representatives from OS, Office for National Statistics, HM Land Registry and staff from the UK Mission to the United Nations. But OS's contribution extends further than the leadership of the delegation. Many of the work groups and expert groups have benefited from OS's geospatial expertise, whether regarding the role that international standards play or the benefits that can be realised through having a consistent approach to the Global Geodetic Reference Frame.

The world is increasingly dominated by Google and internet giants, and hard data gathering and processing can be done more economically by Asian countries. How can OSI remain relevant?

Competition is good! It helps drive geospatial usage and raises awareness. The world is big enough for OS and other companies, but on the other hand we are well respected inside and outside the geospatial community. Last year, we marked 225 years of capturing and supplying authoritative geospatial data and location intelligence that is integral to the better prosperity and well-being of Great Britain. We continue to deliver expertise and value at home (across businesses, governments and individuals) while building our international operations with some very interesting offerings to the global market. One of these services is the Geospatial Maturity Review tool, which we've been developing together with our customers over the past few years. The services assess how mature organisations are at collecting, managing and disseminating geospatial information to meet stakeholder requirements and business goals. The review will help customers understand not only how mature they are now, but how mature customers need them to be. We also have a free, light version of the service available online.

Nowadays, for business survival, collaboration is often seen as more important than competition. What is OS's stance on that?

We understand the value of collaboration and partnering to share expertise and deliver customer solutions. We have a huge network of innovative partners in Great Britain and internationally that are from the private sector (non-traditional geospatial information (GI) organisations), GI organisations and government. Our view is that existing partnerships and new ones are essential to our growth strategy. We will continue expanding our partner ecosystem beyond the 380 partners we have in place today. As we expand globally, we will also transform our partnership model to work with global, regional and niche partners. We are therefore constantly on the lookout for new, innovative, best-of-breed partners to help us deliver smart projects across the globe.

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About Peter Hedlund

Peter Hedlund leads an Ordnance Survey team that helps national mapping and cadastral agencies and governments around the world develop and grow their geospatial capabilities. Over the past years, Ordnance Survey International has been establishing itself as an internationally recognised thought leader within the global geospatial community. Prior to joining Ordnance Survey as managing director, Peter Hedlund was regional director of Middle East and Africa for Trimble, where he produced and implemented strategies that grew Trimble's international business across continents.

<https://www.gim-international.com/content/article/growing-geospatial-capabilities-all-over-the-world>
