

Looking to the Future of Ordnance Survey - Interview with Peter Hedlund



Peter Hedlund leads an OS team that helps National Mapping and Cadastral Agencies and governments around the world develop and grow their geospatial capabilities. Prior to joining OS as Managing Director, Peter was Regional Director of Middle East and Africa for Trimble, where he produced and implemented strategies that grew Trimble's international business across continents.

Geomatics World: What attracted you to join OS and how is your past experience relevant to the position?

Peter Hedlund: 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, it's about leading teams and inspiring people to be innovative and to come up with good products and solutions that solve client issues in a clever and efficient way.

GW: OS's international activities have waxed and waned over the years. Does OSI exist as a separate organisation as part of the OS group of companies? Why is now the time ripe for OS again to seek work internationally?

PH: Almost 20 years ago now, it was a strategic decision for OS 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 a 'one true digital source' for all its geospatial information to operate from, which other government agencies and businesses can confidently use, which enables better decision making. The digital process means things can happen in Great Britain fast and with great efficiency. The experience gained from that process has been invaluable, so too 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!

GW: What particular opportunities around the world do you see where OS's skillset and experience can make a difference?

PH: We take 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 to also 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 Cities, IoT, Connected and Autonomous Vehicle (CAV) and 5G projects. It is interesting, because many of these projects are becoming the catalyst for geospatial data.

GW: How would you describe the ideal customer for OSI? What exactly does OSI offer?

PH: 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, and how it can benefit government, business and its people. What we offer is very specific geospatial consulting services, and we can broaden that to data capture services, project management services. We are here to enable, transfer our knowledge and teach the 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 0.2-0.6% of GDP per annum to a country. Obviously, there are some really large economic benefits for a country to leverage and use geospatial data.

GW: What type of projects has OSI undertaken recently?

PH: In the past 6 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, guiding them towards building, maintaining and running a geospatial framework that supports their communities, which creates better government and economic growth.

GW: Please describe the human resources OSI has at its disposal.

PH: We have 1000 people within OS who are specialised in geospatial consulting and data and they sit 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.

GW: What is the OS contribution to UN-GGIM and how will this help UK geospatial activities?

PH: From 2011-2015 the UK held one of the Co-Chair positions 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 of representatives from OS, Office for National Statistics, HM Land Registry and staff from the UK Mission to the United Nations.

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, be it the role that international standards play, or the benefits that can be realised through having a consistent approach to global geodetic reference frame.

GW: How relevant can OSI be in a world increasingly dominated by Google and internet giants and where any hard data gathering and processing can be done more economically by Asian countries?

PH: Competition is good! It helps drive the usage of geospatial 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 wellbeing of Great Britain. We continue to deliver expertise and value at home (across business, government 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.

GW: For many businesses to survive these days, it is believed that collaboration/cooperation are more important than competition. Is, or has, OS considered cooperating with others? If so, how has it worked out, positively or negatively?

PH: 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 continue expanding our partner eco-system 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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