

Optimism

Optimism is not exactly the atmosphere being breathed out by newspapers and opinion writers these days in discussing the way the economy is likely to develop over the coming months and years. A sinking dollar, a mortgage crisis and the resultant dip in building and construction in the United States are not factors that conjure smiles on the faces of journalists and economists.

Intergeo, held from 25th to 27th September in Leipzig was, however, an optimistic event. For a start, it had more than 16,500 visitors. Although somewhat more compact than last year, it is still by far the biggest survey show in the world. (If you recall, last year the FIG conference ran alongside Intergeo, which drew a lot of new visitors to the trade-fair). The halls in Leipzig were crowded with a strikingly large number of young people. Considering educational programmes all over the world are complaining, this visible presence of the young geo-professional was a good sign. And there's loads of work ahead for them, if Ewout Korpershoek, director of marketing and sales for Topcon Europe Positioning BV knows anything about it. According to Korpershoek, fewer than 10% of all machines that could be automated currently are so. He therefore sees an immense as yet unexploited area of growth in the development and implementation chances offered by machine control and automation over coming years.

Machine control in forestry, agriculture, construction and infrastructure is one of the target fields for the big manufacturers with their new products and releases. Although such diversification requires 'thinking in solutions' and will therefore probably involve a great deal of money and investment on the manufacturer side, just imagine the potential size of this market in the future.

Machine control will make building and construction much more efficient. For instance, creating the slope of a new road with up to millimetre accuracy in height will save tons of asphalt, one of the most expensive products in the construction industry. And imagine how much damage could be prevented by accurately guiding large combines through fields or forests. Short-term investment in new machine-control products will in the long-term enable the constructor or forester to build or control projects more cheaply and run less risk of damage and overuse of expensive materials like white sand, asphalt or pebbles.

If only 10% of all machines are automated and there are another 90% out there awaiting upgrading, the implications are huge. All over the world, machines that need equipping with an appropriate survey and/or GPS product to assure more efficient construction - such an operation will guarantee geomatics manufacturers years of new business.

This and other emergent trends, like the creation of growing numbers of mobile technologies for the geo-professional, enhancement and improvement of existing 3D techniques, and software integration from formerly quite disparate fields such as CAD and GIS, all probably contribute to the optimism shared by Intergeo visitor and exhibitor alike concerning the future of the industry.