

Pencil

The annual Hexagon User Conference 2014 was held from 2 to 6 June in Las Vegas, USA (see my report on page 30). A series of keynote addresses – spread across the various days and amounting to over 8 hours in total – were presented by Hexagon's top managers in the Arena of the MGM Grand Hotel. If you had been hoping to gain great views of the future, you would have been left feeling disappointed. Hexagon's top management is well aware that we are living in an era typified by 'Changing Technology in a Changing Society', which is also the title of my book published in 2003. Hence: 'Prediction is difficult, especially when it concerns the future.' The only vision one can adopt is that change is permanent and the best you can do is to accept that reality when trying to anticipate the future. That is probably the reason why the keynotes were not particularly visionary. However, that was compensated by a rousing event, especially in terms of showmanship and fun. When change is ubiquitous, a leading global company needs to constrain the uncertainties by acquiring firms, amongst other things. Indeed, Hexagon has adopted this policy to insure its future resulting in a wave of takeovers – most recently (11 June 2014) of North West Geomatics, a Canadian aerial mapping firm. Often the firms are small, but creators or users of high-tech equipment. The main criteria are: 'Does the expertise the "prey" is specialised in show sufficient growth potential, and will there be enough synergy with what one has already in house?' Of course, a takeover today does not mean buying bricks and engines, but rather patents, talent and brains. The value of synergy among the various parts of the company was expressed by Mladen Stojic, president of Hexagon Geospatial, using the Dutch windmill as a metaphor. The chaotic phenomenon of wind has been tamed centuries ago to benefit mankind using wings mounted on towers. However, one wing is not enough to set the wheelwork in motion – four wings forged together are needed. The same is true for big companies. The expert knowledge from the various 'wings' has to fit together tightly and in a synergetic way to deliver optimal solutions to customers. 'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts,' as Aristotle said. In order that Hexagon could gain optimal feedback from its customers and hence insight into their problems, attendees were encouraged to recount their professional experiences, not only during the regular sessions but also freely during interviews recorded by a camera crew throughout the event. In case Mladen Stojic is searching for a metaphor for next year, here is one for free: it is the pencil. A pencil is made up of components which at first sight have nothing to do with one other: graphite, clay, wood and a coating. But when forged together, the user gains a synergetic means – a robust tool – for collecting (geo)information.

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