

Q&A with Aidan Mercer, Bentley Systems



To gain real insight into today's geospatial business landscape, 'GIM International' decided to ask some of the sector's most influential companies for their opinions. This series of Q&As captures the current state of the industry from various perspectives, such as which technological and societal developments will have the most impact on the geomatics market, which market segments are the most promising and which areas offer the most substantial growth. The questions also explore the trend towards open data and open-source software. This time, Aidan Mercer from Bentley Systems shares his views.

Which technological developments will affect your product/service portfolio the most in the coming years?

One of the most exciting developments at Bentley are Microsoft Azure-based cloud services that enable our users to achieve better project delivery and asset performance. This is known as our CONNECT Edition portfolio. This next generation of software is helping firms in 'going digital' – this is the ability for data residing in applications to interact with data in other applications in a fully digital environment, one we may describe as 'connected'. The benefits are unbounded, e.g. performance improvements, scalability, efficiency gains, accessibility and more. The ability for our users to access on-premise or cloud-based services gives them choices and flexibility as well as exciting new features like '365 Services' and a range of CONNECT Edition applications.

Which societal developments will influence your share of the geomatics market the most the coming years? How and why?

The world's population is growing by a staggering 200,000 people every day. By 2025, the global population is expected to reach over eight billion people and by 2040 this number could hit nine billion. Experts predict such rapid growth will increase the population to a massive 11 billion people by the turn of the century. Urban expansion is driving new ways of working and a heavy reliance on technology. We've made great progress with our reality modelling applications, in particular ContextCapture CONNECT Edition, which rapidly captures existing site conditions through digital photographs or laser scanning data. This is helping urban planners develop space for new housing, develop new roadways, expand water capacity and understand how to deal with future growth, to name but a few use cases, because of its ability to capture assets or entire cities. It is slowly becoming the must-have technology and we are excited about the contribution it provides to society.

Which market segments are the most promising for your products/services?

Bentley covers all infrastructure asset types with a concerted focus on advancing infrastructure projects. One major focus for us in 2018 and the coming years will be 'digital cities'. This, I believe, is an evolution of smart cities by applying the emerging technological advancements that can deliver significant value, like the Internet of Things (IoT) or machine learning. When applied to cities, with all the data they create, the value or outcomes could be hugely significant.

In which parts of the world do you envisage substantial growth in users of your products/services?

At our annual Year in Infrastructure Conference held in Singapore in October 2017, we recognised the best projects from around the world at the Be Inspired Awards. Of the 23 categories, ten of the winners were from China. These projects were selected by independent jurors, and it goes to show the quality of infrastructure projects in the region and the innovative use of Bentley software on these projects. Also, the burgeoning use of ContextCapture on all types of infrastructure projects is enabling a new way of working, inclusive of engineering workflows that are bringing real excitement to the market.

Open data is becoming increasingly available all over the world. How will this trend affect your business?

Open data is very important. We have many users that are publishing data, like cities and local authorities. Bentley has been committed to open standards for many years, particularly on the geocoordination of applications. An example would be a GIS database, like CityGML, which has been developed as the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) standard describing such things as 3D urban objects as an application schema and which comprises different thematic areas. Although the model is in XML format, it is geometrically compatible with Oracle Spatial for RDBMS. Such standards provide the framework for semantic and geometric relationships and have the functionality of representing differing levels of detail required for complex infrastructure projects. These standards can also ensure the same object is represented in different levels of detail simultaneously, and integration with BIM, for example, is very important. Bentley has been a corporate sponsor of OGC for many years and continues to see value in open data.

Will the tendency of increasing use of open-source software be a threat or an opportunity for your business?

We certainly see the value in open source and actively encourage third parties to contribute to aspects of our software. For example, our IModelHub 2.0 Platform has an API that allows third parties to create bridges within the cloud services of the offering as we address change management for certain aspects of a project making it very powerful and adaptable. You must harness the tremendous potential

and expertise in the ecosystem so that projects can benefit, and we see real value in this.

Aidan Mercer

Aidan Mercer joined Bentley in 2010 and is currently industry marketing director for AEC. He has held various roles in geospatial and utilities marketing with Bentley and previously held various marketing roles in similar high-tech organisations. Mercer's global responsibilities include reality modelling and smart city initiatives. Aidan graduated with a bachelor's degree in history and holds a master's degree in marketing from the University of Gloucestershire as well as various CIM marketing qualifications. Aidan has written extensively on global topics such as BIM and 'going digital' as he aligns the company message to audiences around the world.

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