

Q&A with... Ian Stilgoe, Topcon Europe Positioning



To gain a sound insight into what is going on in today's geospatial business landscape, 'GIM International' has asked 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, Ian Stilgoe of Topcon Europe Positioning shares his thoughts.

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

Trends that are going mainstream in consumer technology, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), are impacting the way we work on site and in the office on construction projects. This pace of change is widening our user base and speeding up the adoption of automation and connectivity across the whole workflow – from the site to the office, and from excavating initial foundations to asset monitoring. This is helping our customers to work smarter – meaning real-time communication between all stakeholders involved on a project as well as less waste and less time-consuming processes. The fast pace of technological development has shaped the way we work with our customers. We have developed long-standing relationships with the likes of Autodesk, Bentley and Intel. We are always open to working with the right partner to complement our hardware and software offering. This helps to ensure we have the best package of expertise and technology for the specific requirements of a project.

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

According to Standard and Poors, there is a US \$36 trillion deficit between the amount we need to spend on infrastructure globally and the amount of capacity currently available within the industry. Increasing urbanisation, growing economies and aging post-war infrastructure in Europe mean there are huge demands to create and maintain infrastructure. We believe we're at the crunch point where as an industry we need to work collaboratively to be able to meet this shortfall between capacity and demand. It's a key focus for our business, as we work to create and help our clients implement technology to increase efficiency and maximise capacity.

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

Precision farming has a reasonable adoption rate and the recovery of the market will positively influence our business. The area which will have the most significant impact in 2018 is the adoption of machine control and automated construction processes. This spans many market segments as construction companies of all sizes look to technology to increase efficiency within their business.

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

There's particular opportunity for market growth in areas such as India, Indonesia and China, as these countries are still constructing new infrastructure at an impressive rate. Although there's a lot of uncertainty in Europe, we've seen recovery and growth in the region as countries invest in updating and developing infrastructure such as rail networks and utilities.

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

It is critical to have accurate and traceable data. In an era of supposedly 'fake news', the source and reliability of data is more important than ever. Open data is a useful addition to the decision-making process you may be involved in, but it should not be taken as absolute. Our kit is known for reliability and accuracy of data, but we also take the traceability needs of our users seriously. MAGNET Enterprise is one example of this. The software records all the field observations and shared project data, storing these in a secure cloud environment which can provide the traceability from field source.

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

Open-source software (OSS) is seen as mostly an opportunity. Open source feeds creativity and there are a lot of useful ideas and products developed by nimble start-ups which develop into great platforms. Open-source routines can speed up pilot

projects to test out new products and ideas. However, you always have to be careful if utilising OSS in any developments you want to commercialise. Many open-source agreements are not open source for all applications and users. The age-old saying 'Check the small print' is vital for those companies wanting to integrate open source.

Ian Stilgoe

Ian Stilgoe, FCInstCES, MRICS, joined Topcon in 2000, having started his career as a chartered engineering surveyor at Laing Civil Engineering playing a key role in major infrastructure and energy projects. Currently vice president of geopositioning at Topcon Europe Positioning, Ian's expertise in software and monitoring have helped to develop the Topcon market share across Europe, supporting customers with technology and expertise on a wide range of projects.

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