

Transformation

If there has been one development the last ten years that has transformed the life of professionals, consumers, companies and business and non-profit organisations alike, it is the internet. It has changed the life and way of thinking of these professionals and consumers and it has changed the way businesses react, communicate and behave. It has changed the world economy, launching it towards globalisation! And throughout this decade, accelerators pushing the envelope have been those visionary entrepreneurs (or hobbyists become entrepreneurs) behind websites like Amazon.com, Altavista.com, YouTube.com. And champion of these visionaries, the people behind Google.com. who paved the way for searching, revealing and sharing content, and buying, talking and trading on the web.

One of the plenary sessions during the Map World Forum held between 22nd and 25th January in Hyderabad, India was “Emerging Business Models”™. It was a popular session, with speakers like GeoEye CEO Matthew O’Connell, Google Earth CTO Michael Jones, Prof. Michael Blakemore from the University of Durham, UK and Bas Kok, president-elect of Geospatial Data Infrastructure, and Delft University of Technology in The Netherlands. There were lively discussions during which speakers and delegates investigated possible new business models. To be honest, that hour and a half did not really throw any up. But there was one very clear outcome: the web is transforming, upsetting, outdating and crushing old business models - a hard but inevitable conclusion.

A characteristic feature of the above-mentioned causes of the change shaking up business models in the geospatial business is that they create the possibility to share, reveal and search content for free. Consumers and professionals have got used to obtaining free information and goods pertaining to anything and everything imaginable; stuff that ten years ago they had to pay for. Google Earth has made geospatial information free and accessible to professionals and the masses. For the latter, it is praised. For the former it is, at least in private, cursed for putting strain on those businesses still asking money for their services. It’s not as if all geospatial information will become freely available. It costs a lot of money to keep a satellite in orbit; employees will always want to earn a good wage and enterprises to make a good profit. So the main question not only still stands but is becoming increasingly urgent: who is providing the means of providing these wages, profits and R&D? One thing is for sure: geospatial professionals will become less and less willing to pay the full pound. Therefore the entrepreneurs will “no, must - look for other ways to get the money in.

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