

Year of the consumer

The year ends and everybody is a little more reflective than at other times. A change in year always brings memories of the one that's almost over and prophecies for the next. I would like to stick to prophecy and leave the memories. (Although I can't resist telling you that GIM International has had a memorably good year. Our website is drawing more and more visitors; we upped the frequency of the e-newsletter from biweekly to once a week. And our magazine continued to act as oracle for many of you, describing new developments and covering news from all over the world as it has for more than twenty years!) Enough...you may expect plenty more exciting moves from GIM International in 2008, but that goes for your business too.

The development for the geomatics business must be the turnaround to face consumer markets. I believe 2008 will see the incorporation of geo-related data in many more consumer activities than we can imagine right now. Whereas up until today we have seen applications in the automotive sector, one can think of ways to navigate by bicycle as well, or the possibilities for tracking pets in a neighbourhood; no more lost cats! Geo-referenced data is already playing a big role in the insurance world: where are the highest crime rates or flood risks and where are higher premiums appropriate? I am undoubtedly missing out a lot of examples of new applications already in existence or development. But the message is clear: I believe we will see a lot more companies currently active in a business-to-business environment making for the direct business-to-consumer playing field. That'll give businesses an opportunity to grow for years and years to come, and possibly at a rate hitherto unseen in the business-to-business sector. But be prepared.

On the one hand competition will be fierce, on the other it will be hard trying to level the playing field in a market in which the consumer is king rather than partners in the business. Just one example: your partner, also active in geomatics, will understand what the difficulties are in delivering metre-accuracy on a GPS handheld. The consumer, no technical engineer, will not get the difficulty and will demand the highest possible accuracy. Most challenging of all, no doubt, but inevitable in serving this new group of customers, is finding ways of grasping consumer wishes and combining them with notions stemming from all the old and valued customers in the business-to-business environment.

It's going to be an exciting year; that's for sure. Plenty of new opportunities for your companies, institutions and government organisations. Good luck with it all, and the best of health in 2008!

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