

Intergeo Press Conference: Looking Back and Forward

In line with tradition, this year's Intergeo press conference once again took place at noon on Wednesday. Despite the press room being a little difficult to find, members of the international geomatics press came together to hear the views of the event's key stakeholders. The press conference, which was based around the central theme of 'Digital World – Connected World', not only reflected on the past 20 years of Intergeo, but also looked ahead to the future of the geomatics industry.

(By Wim van Wegen, editorial manager, GIM International)

The speakers were Prof Dr-Ing Karl Friedrich Thöne, president of the DVW (German Surveying Association), Erik J. Arvesen, vice-president of Trimble's geospatial division, Jürgen Schomakers, director of Esri Deutschland, Dr-Ing Jürgen Dold, president of Leica Geosystems, Bruce McCormick, president of EUROGI, and Olaf Freier, managing director of Hinte, the company which organises Intergeo.

EUROGI

Bruce McCormick introduced the European Umbrella Organisation for Geographic Information (EUROGI). The organisation's vision is that geographic information with all its aspects should become a fully integrated component of the European knowledge-based society. McCormick spoke of a tendency towards more open data – everything must be open. He stated that while this brings possible risks, such as terrorist threats, the potential advantages outweigh the disadvantages. He illustrated his point by mentioning the development regarding open data technology to improve water supply, which at the same time poses new risks.

Karl Friedrich Thöne emphasised that 20 years of Intergeo is a great success. Although the first Intergeo as we know it was launched in 1995, he also referred to how the predecessor of Intergeo started back in 1873 in Eisenach, Germany. The secret of Intergeo's success, according to Thöne, is the fact that the event is unique and one of a kind, a true networking platform. With regard to the future, he emphasised that Intergeo needs to be the place for solutions and intelligent applications in order to be able to rise to the challenges of the 21st century. To his visible delight, Thöne remarked that he had never seen so many young and international visitors attend Intergeo, which he regarded as a very good sign for the future of the geomatics sector.

Turning Point

Jürgen Schomakers, director of Esri Deutschland, described Intergeo as heading towards a turning point. In his opinion, Intergeo is a platform for information and interaction, and he foresees the event being even broader in character when it reaches its next lustrum in five years' time. Erik Arvesen from Trimble recalled how, in 1995, RTK was the state-of-the-art technology that helped the industry to advance significantly. Nowadays – with total stations, GNSS, mobile devices and everything else connected together – interconnectivity is the key to moving forward, he said. Arvesen also spoke of applications that span many industries, presenting exciting new opportunities for further expansion.

UAVs

Olaf Freier was himself an exhibitor at Intergeo during the first years and is now managing director of the organising company behind it. He reminded the audience in the press room that Intergeo started with 180 exhibitors in Dortmund in 1995, and has since expanded to over 500 exhibitors. Compared to the 1995 edition, Intergeo now has a much more international focus. To illustrate the changing face of the geomatics world, he pointed out that 55 of this year's exhibitors are UAV companies. Jürgen Dold from Leica Geosystems explained that he was familiar with Intergeo's predecessor, *Geodätentag*, from his student days. Back then the measurement market was the primary focus and it remains so today, although much more in the form of GNSS-integrated applications. He also mentioned UAVs and the rapidly growing opportunities they offer. Companies such as Google and Microsoft have served as a catalyst for making geomatics techniques familiar to a wide audience.

Open Data

Referring to the venue for this year's event Prof Dr-Ing Thöne emphasised that Berlin, as the seat of the federal government, was purposefully chosen to host the 20th edition of Intergeo. The geomatics sector is closely interwoven with politics, plus Germany needs a national information strategy. Schomakers indicated that he hoped to see further developments in open data, mentioning companies such as Microsoft and Google as well as Facebook and Apple as organisations which stimulate the creation of useful GIS applications. Continuing on the topic of open data, Jürgen Dold from Leica Geosystems announced that he was all for it, but that on the other hand there is also a growing need for apps as solutions which make the entire process as simple as possible – from sensor to information. Erik Arvesen from Trimble agreed with Dold, saying that it was necessary to have the ability for a data marketplace, accessible for everyone, but that the demand for smart solutions is also increasing rapidly.

Future Perspectives

With respect to the future of the geomatics sector, Arvesen observed a consolidation of companies in the industry and within the various disciplines. The trend is towards meeting the needs of surveyors and their customers by providing 'ready-made', all-in-one solutions which reveal to them which action to take and which decisions to make. He also pointed out that 'global localisation' is essential: what works in Belgium does not necessarily work in Brazil. In a world in which apps and UAVs are becoming ever-more important, Arvesen does not expect a slow death of traditional surveying equipment. After all, laptops and iPads exist alongside each other, he said by way of example, since they are not rival technologies. Dold interjected that it is necessary to give customers choices. The industry must modernise its software to be more 'app-like'.

Rounding off the press conference, Olaf Freier shared his view of the future. His main hope is that Intergeo will continue to develop as a platform for dialogue, helping to translate technologies into applications. New answers must be found to questions which concern society as a whole and the geomatics sector has a key role to play, Freier said, reiterating the contribution that Intergeo, as a platform for knowledge-exchange, makes to that process.

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