

Illustrating the Importance of the Geospatial Sector – A Review of GEO Business 2015



Attendance at this year's GEO Business, held on 27 and 28 May in London, UK, was up 25% on last year's figures, with the 2015 event attracting more than 2,000 people from 47 countries over the course of the two days. It provided geospatial professionals with a comprehensive insight into what is an exciting and progressive industry that is positioning itself at the very forefront of new technology and practice.

The conference featured 24 guest speakers who covered topics ranging from the latest GIS technology to aquatics, from data infrastructure to bridges and from boats to lasers. All of the speakers were leaders in their fields. Whether theorists or practitioners, each spoke positively about the industry while also encouraging debate. Attendees were

often forced to consider how they could improve their role as an essential part of the built environment programme.

On day one Kate Hall, director for the built environment at HS2, presented the opening keynote address on the controversial issue of the planned HS2 high-speed railway, championing the impact it will have on the UK economy. She explored its value and outlined advantages, not only for the UK but also for the surveying industry as a whole due to the amount of surveys and engineering that will be required throughout the project lifecycle. The audience responded well to such a strong and positive opening speech, which demonstrated in the clearest terms the geospatial industry's importance to the progress and development of a nation's infrastructure and growth.

Geospatial surveying and BIM

Another highlight on day one was the 'BIM Meets Geospatial' session with Paul Hill, senior consultant from Arup, Morten Hertz Knudsen, specialist and market manager from COWI, and Jana Siebenbrodt, product manager from FARO 3D Software. Each of the three speakers focused on a different aspect of how geospatial surveying interacts with – and is becoming part of – the BIM process.

They were not the only ones to examine the role of BIM within the industry. Coverage of BIM was rife during the event, underlining the importance of geospatial expertise in development and construction projects. It was fascinating to learn more about the capabilities of the software, and to hear about how manufacturers are developing it to make the surveyor's role in BIM easier.

Measurable results

While many of the speakers delved into the theory and explored ideas in considerable depth, there were also valuable insights into live projects, including the true practicalities of activity, real outputs and measurable results. For example, Yung Loo, tunnel engineer at Arup, presented a seminar on locating CERN's next-generation particle accelerator, 'The 100km Future Circular Collider'. Darren Cunningham, scheme project manager at Network Rail, discussed how to use BIM to improve 100 million annual journeys at London Waterloo Station, and Ben Scott-Robinson, head of interactive experience at Ordnance Survey, introduced OS Locate, declaring: "Simplicity is everything." The projects were diverse, showing the breadth of the survey industry and its related professions. Combinations of theory and examples of practicalities were particularly successful in encouraging debate and generating a sense of realism – and in revealing to the audience that theory and practice can sometimes differ.

The case for a UK cadastre

At the other end of the spectrum, legal issues were also addressed. Martin Penney, Adam Harwood, and Julia Stolle from Technics delivered an insightful argument into boundary demarcation in the UK and Europe and whether there is a case for a UK cadastre. This raised the interesting question of the role of the survey in neighbourhood disputes, repositioning and boundary demarcation. The Technics team argued how a UK cadastre – digital country-wide mapping – would benefit the legal profession and property transactions. That topic sparked debate, which is unquestionably important, and GEO Business 2015 was a suitable forum for such debate to take place.

Out on the exhibition floor a range of suppliers, including instrument and equipment manufacturers, associations, surveyors and software developers, had designed their stands for maximum impact and engaged the constant stream of visitors. This year's event attracted a notable number of industry entrants keen to learn more about what the industry – and the companies who are active within it – can offer. Similarly, industry clients and partners seemed well represented. The atmosphere was one of exploration – together with peers, with the industry's next generation and with potential customers and partners alike.

As if echoing the industry's evolution, this year's exhibition floor was home to a single stand for all the collaborators of the event: The Survey Association (TSA), Chartered Institute of Civil Engineers (ICES), Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE) (involved for the first time this year) and Association of Geographical Information (AGI). That they all came together as one demonstrates the breadth of industry support. The GEO Business conference is still growing and appeals to those outside of the surveying industry as well as within it, which only serves to illustrate the importance of the geospatial sector.

Written by Graham Mills, chairman of Technics Geospatial Surveyors, published in the July 2015 issue of GIM International.

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