Informative Storytelling and Disneyland - HxGN Live 2016

The seventh HxGN Live conference was held in California last June. It was the first time it had been hosted in the Golden State, the Anaheim Convention Center marking a break from previous years at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. Evolving applications for unmanned vehicle use, trends in laser scanning linked to GeoICT and cloud-based services and solutions were all points of interest, while local trips to Disneyland brought back memories of the first Hexagon Live in Orlando, reports Adam P. Spring.

The world is becoming a smart place. Hexagon's product portfolio is therefore anything but static. In fact, sensor-equipped backpacks, tank-like vehicles and UAVs could be seen across all four days of the event. It was obvious too that Hexagon services and solutions enable their users to collect precise information in most environments. HxGN Live was an event where multiple narratives were taking place, a fact reiterated in the opening keynote from Hexagon President and CEO Ola Rollén.

The Power of Stories

Rollén used storytelling in order to highlight the value of provenance in an information-rich world. In this case, the end of a bedtime story was one example used to detail how Hexagon users should fuse their narrative with data. Without the details, the end result are seen to lack context and the information that give it value. It was an opening keynote that would have made Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher who developed the idea of Empirical Provenance or Origin in 1781, very proud!

Integration of mobile sensors was also discussed in a way that brought together a lot of the technologies on display. Geoff Jacobs a foundation stone of the Leica Geosystems HDS brand had hinted at a new trend emerging before the conference began. Rollén's discussion of advanced analytics and artificial intelligence fed into this trend on a broader scale. Sensors and sensing were enabling Hexagon users to document and bring multiple degrees of measurement together, all in real time. Rollén used crowd analysis and gun control at a rock concert as an example. Hexagon services and solution were seen to be making the world a safer place.

Overall, the symbiotic relationships between information flows, technologies and people were alive and well in the opening keynote for 2016. Rollén ended the session by breaking this down into a basic overview in terms of workflow: "So the feedback loop is already there between the modern world and the real world. But we need to augment this feedback loop to make it more efficient so that we can continue to enjoy an open society."

GeoICT and HDS

User trends associated with the rise of location-aware devices like mobile phones (now well ingrained in GISdriven markets) had started to make their way into the high-definition survey (HDS) based workflows. Fusing topographic maps and real-world positions with point cloud information was popular at HxGN Live. It ran across all HDS track sessions and could be seen in a diverse range of presentations.

For example, Nikolas Smilovsky of BPG Designs demonstrated that communication hubs like data centres were becoming money-rich clients for HDS providers in the US. Project communication tools like Truview are helping to communicate point cloud data to his clients, while his background in GIS enable him to put a location-aware spin on things. While Dana Lockett and the National Park Service were combining the experience of HDS in preexisting plan drawings using panorama tools like Kolor and PTGui with interactive maps. The end user experience for high definition survey and documentation was now being interwoven with information and communication technologies (ICT). It was online, interactive and being transformed by handheld devices like mobile phones and tablets.

Retelling Stories

When Stan Lee was lead writer at Marvel Comics he wrote each of his stories to include one feature. He always reintroduced character backstories so that readers new to the likes of IronMan or SpiderMan were never excluded from the action. The lesson learnt by Lee was never assume your customer knows anything about the subject matter you are communicating. Otherwise, you may exclude the audience and prevent your customer base from growing.

Mike Harvey, product applications manager for HDS, put this idea into practice at HxGN Live 2016. The Introduction to 3D laser scanning / HDS was first given at SPAR 2016, where Harvey and Larry Kleinkemper of Lanmar Service had co-presented the session. It was popular at that gathering in Texas to the point where Hexagon customers were also treated to a lesson in laser scanning for beginners. Point cloud based survey and design was a key player in Anaheim.

Actionable Information

The term Actionable Information has been at the centre of all Hexagon conferences. Though the idea can be traced back to the 1990s, when technology-based user networks started to form and required communication-based Action Workflows to be developed, HxGN 2016 really did show information in action. For example, Hexagon Geospatial had already announced the Incident Analyser M. App before the conference. Where real-time maps are packaged around incident detection and response times in urban environments, it is an extension of the Smart M.App cloud-based service announced in 2015. Andy Wells, MD at Sterling Geo, was quick to point out how the lines were blurring for Hexagon customers.

As official distributors of ERDAS and GeoMedia products, Sterling Geo were well placed to comment on Hexagon related consumer trends. For Wells, cloud-based services like Smart M. Apps and the Hexagon Imagery Programme (HxIP) were proving to have limitless potential. It provided content that could be used across all services and solutions under the Hexagon umbrella, be it Intergraph or Leica Geosystems products.

Disney Land Park

Disneyland opened in Anaheim, California in 1955. It later changed its name to Disneyland Park when it expanded in the 1990s. Walt Disney himself came up with the idea for this theme park where both adults and children could have fun. It came to him when he watched his daughters ride the merry-go-round in Griffin Park, Los Angeles. HxGN Live attendees were treated to A Night at the Park on June 16th and were happy to prove Walt had the right idea.

Summary

The six conferences that have been held in North America provide snapshots for the evolution of Hexagon as a company. For example, there was a general sense of wonderment at the first event in Florida, 2011. The big question that year, which has continued to subsequent events in Las Vegas, was the acquisition of Intergraph and how it would develop. Fast forwarding to California in 2016, it was now hard to imagine a time when Intergraph had not been part of the Hexagon business portfolio. This feeling spread beyond product integration alone (of which manufacture and mobile mapping solutions were big themes in 2016). Employees organically see themselves as working under one overarching brand.

It was interesting to see the difference in customer attitudes at HxGN Live 2016. The obvious spectre of Brexit loomed large for British customers. Whereas, fascinations with popular culture in the US continued to feed into the travel plans of Australian attendees: the adult "Disneyland" of Las Vegas had been replaced by family trips to the real Disneyland in Anaheim. For American customers, of which there were new and returning faces, the gold rush of domestic economic recovery had carried on from the previous year. The competitive edge was alive and well at HxGN Live 2016.

This article was published in Geomatics World September/October 2016