



Guest Editorial

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Survey Summit 2013

Here in the United States the surveying profession has been under tremendous pressure for a number of years as it struggles to cope with a poor economy and a rapidly changing technology landscape. The small land surveying firms that had more work than they could handle during the real estate boom leading up to the collapse of 2007/2008 have not recovered and it may be a long while before they do.

At the same time, although the majority of firms transitioned to GPS most have not been able to afford six figure laser scanners and the complexity associated with shifting from 2D plane survey to 3D geodetic calculations. Add to this the demise of the ACSM - the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping, the leading national professional surveying organization and I think it is fair to say that the average surveyor is being forced to deal with a very dynamic work environment.

With this as the backdrop, plus the restriction on government travel and the 4th of July holiday weekend schedule the Esri Survey Summit witnessed its third straight decline in attendance, but the good news is there was a frank discussion of all of these topics and a commitment to revamp this potentially valuable event for next year - more on that in a moment.

The conference itself offered a lot of content in just two short days, plus the ability to connect with the Esri User Conference on Monday and Tuesday, which includes access to the plenary sessions and the exhibit hall. On Saturday the morning included a series of lightning talks from a number of organizations including NGS, the Geospatial Association and NSPS. From there the program moved into a series of technology presentations where the main emphasis was on the cloud.

Brian Matsubara, Head of Global Technology Alliances for Amazon was the keynote presenter and he more than earned the spot. He provided amazing insight into Amazon Cloud Services including the idea that by using the cloud companies can experiment with huge computing resources which can allow them to "fail more quickly". He noted that they have reduced the price of using their cloud services 27 times as they achieve increasing economies of scale - unheard of. As Brian noted, Amazon wants to be the most customer-centric company in the world. In speaking with a few people who use Amazon all the time they had nothing but praise for their services.

On Sunday, following a fun social afternoon the Survey Summit split into a number of tracks that included LiDAR and BIM, the fusion of geodesy with GIS and an ASCE workshop where we discussed the issues surrounding professional licensure and the changing industry landscape. We all agreed that we should plan to take up this discussion in a lot more detail at next year's event.

In the closing ceremony David Totman, Esri's Industry Manager for Public Works announced that he is stepping up to work with Donny Sosa to revamp next year's event by reaching out to a number of potential partners including the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) and the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). There is also the possibility of combining the Summit with the two year old Esri 3D Mapping and LiDAR Forum, which I think would be a very good idea.

The surveying profession is at a crossroads. There are those who still do not see the value in GIS technology some 40 years after its introduction. For those the Esri Survey Summit will probably never be of interest, but for professionals who are looking for new opportunities to participate in the shift to a twenty first century view of the role of the surveying profession here in the U.S. mark your calendar for next year and join the discussion. 