

Survey Sponsors: Geospatial Solutions

For more than 15 years, *Geospatial Solutions* has been the voice of the geospatial community. Widely acknowledged as the most reliable and nonbiased resource for those who use spatial technologies, the magazine investigates how organizations benefit from spatial information and how they are extending those benefits across the enterprise using traditional computing platforms as well as intranets, the Internet, mobile field technologies, wireless communications, and handheld computer appliances. The magazine serves decision makers in government, the private sector, and academia.

Last month, *Geospatial Solutions* and TerraGo® Technologies conducted a survey of *Geospatial Solutions* newsletter subscribers. We wanted to find out more about enterprise GIS strategies and how the increasing demand for geospatial data inside and outside the organization is impacting GIS departments and staffs. First of all though, we had to ask the most obvious question: “Is geospatial really that hot or is all the talk about a GIS move to the mainstream just hype?”

Frankly, we weren’t surprised that a majority said the demand for geospatial data is increasing. We’ve all heard the stories and seen how more and more “non-traditional” companies and organizations are leveraging geospatial data for a variety of business functions.

We do have to admit though that we were a little taken back by the pervasiveness. Virtually everyone reported that departments across their organizations are now utilizing GIS data for a variety of applications. Almost nine in 10 also said customers, business partners and other people outside their organizations have a rapidly growing appetite for geospatial data, leaving GIS pros scrambling to implement methodologies and technologies that can help everyone from the CEO to John Q. Public easily access and effectively use the data they produce.

Survey Sponsors: TerraGo Technologies

TerraGo Technologies provides solutions that help customers leverage valuable geospatial data across organizations and easily share georegistered cartographic data that can be viewed and used by anyone anywhere with or without Internet connections. Using MAP2PDF, GIS users are able to convert complex geospatial information into easy-to-use, interactive GeoPDF files with extensive embedded data and mapping features that they can share with anyone who has access to Adobe® Reader®. End users can perform a variety of functions such as querying attributes, measuring distances, displaying coordinates and tracking locations. TerraGo customers use GeoPDF files to bridge the technology gap between valuable GIS data and the people who need access to it.

Highlights from the survey included:

- Over 90% of respondents said demand for geospatial data from non-traditional users is increasing, with almost as many reporting increasing demand from outside their organizations as well.
- Less than half of respondents say they currently have an enterprise strategy in place for sharing geospatial data with other departments and organizations, but another third said they are working on one. Most organizations are using a combination of web-based and distributed technologies to address issues.

- Speaking of issues, the majority of participants said their biggest barriers to effectively sharing GIS data include lack of tools that help other people understand and effectively use data, a lack of budget to deploy the proper tools and a lack of education on the value of GIS data.
- Lack of knowledge and lack of tools to help anyone utilize GIS data features prominently in the problems GIS pros have when they attempt to share geospatial data. Over two-thirds reported their number one headache is people outside of GIS departments not having the ability to access and interpret the GIS data they receive.
- Finally, the news is all good on future fronts as a wide margin of survey participants reports their overall influence in the organization is increasing. A majority also expects their management to vote with their pocketbooks in the next five years with growing budgets for GIS-related expenditures.

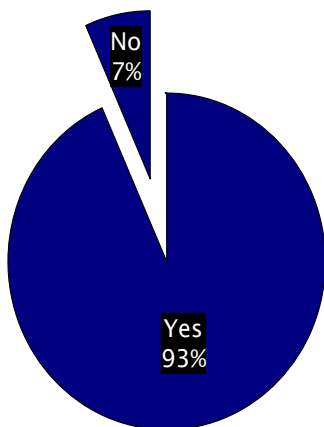
Survey Participants: Who They Are
 Survey participants were subscribers to *Geospatial Solutions* weekly newsletter or opt-in lists where the survey was featured in two December editions and a one-to-one mailing. Over 200 readers took time to complete the survey which featured 14 questions about use of geospatial data across enterprises. Near 50% of the GIS managers, analysts and other professionals who responded represent U.S. state and local governments with the balance spread among federal employees, private enterprises and international subscribers.

We queried participants on demand for geospatial data, who wants it and why, the technologies GIS pros are utilizing to share data, the barriers they are encountering today and where they see the future fit for GIS departments and geospatial data.

Enterprise Strategies and Technologies

Since the vast majority of survey respondents said demand for geospatial data are increasing across the enterprise, we thought it would be interesting to query on what organizations are doing to meet the demand and what technologies they're using today as well as what gaps exist.

Increasing Demand for Geospatial Data

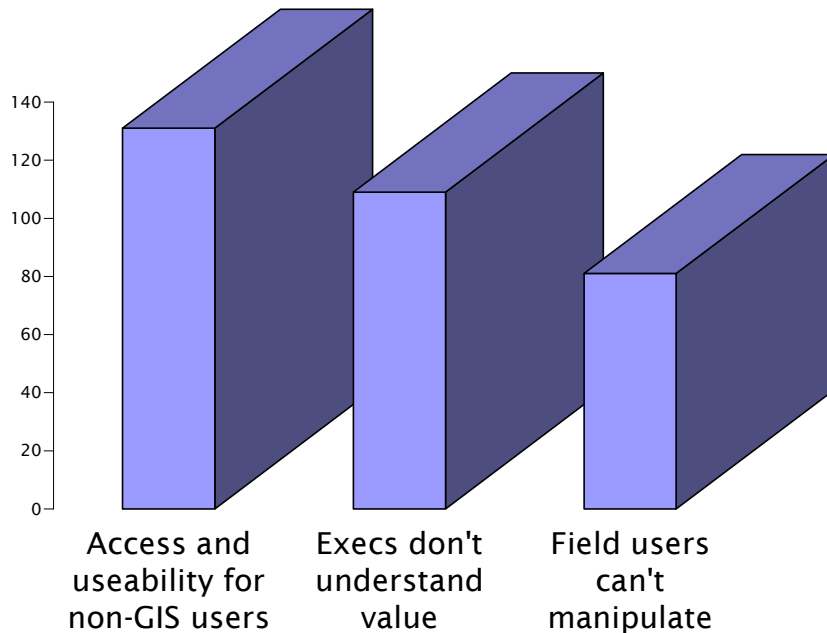


While less than half of the participants said they have an enterprise strategy in place, eight in 10 are either already up to speed or addressing it. It's apparent that most organizations see the importance and benefit of a comprehensive enterprise approach to sharing GIS data with others and integrating their systems with other business applications.

The majority of respondents are using a combination of Web-based and distributed technologies to address their needs and 97% say they are either already utilizing or plan to utilize Web services as a means for easily sharing data with people and applications outside their GIS organization.

This underscores the overall theme that GIS pros see the value of tools that empower people outside the world of GIS with ready access to data, especially when they can help themselves. Almost one in two respondents said GIS professionals spend too much time explaining data and making it useful for non-GIS audiences.

Top Problems with Sharing GIS Data



As a matter of fact, the inability of non-GIS audiences to easily access and interpret geospatial data was the top problem survey participants reported encountering in their attempts to share information with others. In addition, they said that tools are needed to help field personnel better utilize and update data in addition to solutions that help everyone collaborate more effectively on GIS data.

As for integration with other business systems, an almost equal number of participants said they either already have GIS data integrated with other systems or they are planning integration. Together, they comprised almost 90% of all respondents. This data point is interesting since a little over half of survey respondents said that currently, executives don't completely understand the value of geospatial data. Obviously though, with such large numbers of integration plans underway, a growing awareness of its benefits exists.

Who Needs Geospatial Data and What are they Doing with Them?

Currently, field personnel, facilities and infrastructure management professionals and emergency responders are the biggest consumers of geospatial data with more than half of survey respondents claiming the first two groups as users. In the future, most survey respondents expect them to continue being prolific consumers, while other groups pick up the pace. Survey participants say significant increases in the use of geospatial data are planned for enhancing customer service, improving transportation and logistics and for use as a business intelligence tool.

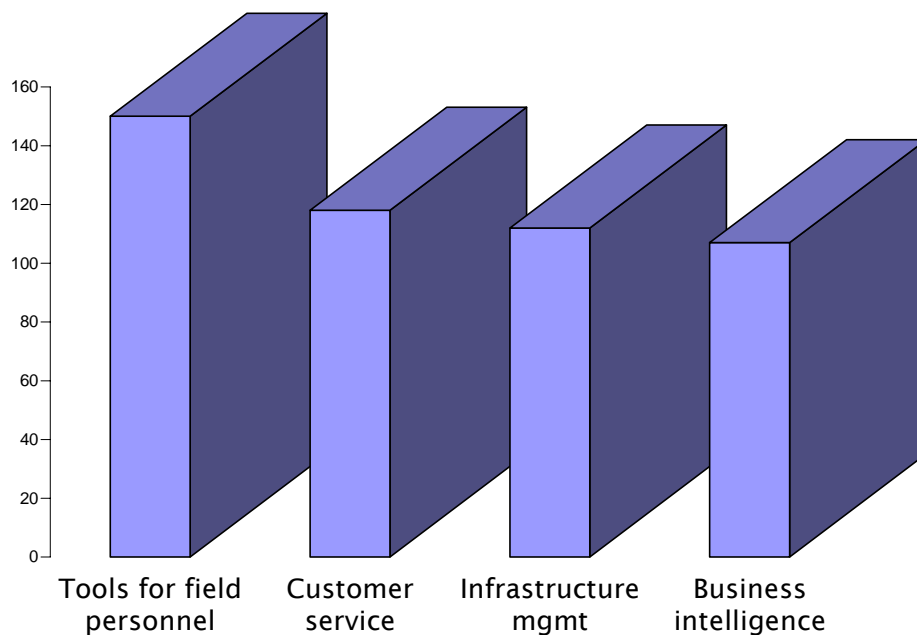
Outside their organizations, survey participants report sharing geospatial data with a variety of groups including business partners, vendors, educational institutions, customers, citizens and community leaders.

Where do we go from here?

Over half of survey respondents said they believe with the right enterprise strategy and tools to fully leverage geospatial data, their organizations could do a better job of managing assets and resources, enhance customer service and increase efficiencies.

They also believe that as the integration and sharing of geospatial data increase, so does the value of the data itself and the GIS organization in general. However, survey participants said the number one benefit to a strategy that promotes the use of geospatial data across the enterprise is the empowerment of managers to make better business decisions.

Top Future Uses for GIS Data



Now would be a wonderful time to choose a career in GIS according to our survey participants. The vast majority of them report they are seeing an increase in their roles and influence inside their organizations and the majority believe that budgets for GIS-related expenses will increase over the next two to five years.

In summary, the survey confirmed that the news for the geospatial industry and its professionals is very promising and the prospects for GIS-related technology providers look strong too.

Demand for geospatial data is sharply increasing as organizations and people outside the fraternity discover the value and benefits of utilizing geospatial intelligence and there are plenty of opportunities:

- Opportunities to educate executives on the value of geospatial data.
- Opportunities to help people see the links between the problems they are trying to solve and the data GIS pros can provide to address them.

- Opportunities for technology vendors to provide tools that help GIS professionals help everyone else fully leverage the highly valuable information that resides in GIS databases.

Geospatial Solutions will continue to provide editorial insight into these trends and many more as the ways organizations utilize geospatial data change and evolve, so please visit the website often and if you haven't already, subscribe to *Geospatial Solutions* newsletters for the latest information.

TerraGo Technologies also invites you to visit its website at www.terragotech.com to find out more about GeoPDF®, a distribution format that leverages Adobe® Reader® to connect all kinds of users to geospatial data in a format anyone can easily access and use.