

Date

Tuesday 17 July 2007

Title of session

Plenary: New Technologies – Disruptive or Enabling?

Name of presenter/chair

Chair: Brendan Boyle, Chief Executive, Land Information New Zealand

Presenter: Robin Manning, Research Foresight Manager, British Telecommunications plc

Rapporteurs

Colin Henderson, Ordnance Survey and Selena Patton, Defence Geographic Centre

Presentation title: Geospatial Futurology

Robin Manning is a researcher and futurologist from BT. Robin explained to the audience how BT see themselves as an Information and Communication Technology company rather than a traditional telecommunications provider. He explained how the futurologist part of his job title is just a fancy term for researcher. Corporate foresight is about trying to understand future strategy and looking at the disruptions and possibilities for the future. The research department in BT looks 5 years into the future while the futurologists look even further. BT publish a technology timeline which can be downloaded from their web site, this timeline considers the future of everything – even the possibility of extra terrestrial life! BT have been publishing the timeline now for over a decade so it has been possible measure their accuracy, roughly 85%.

Robin believes that the biggest challenge businesses will have to face in the future will be the affects of climate change. It is his view that it could be as big an issue as the Cold War and even has the potential to have as big an impact on the modern world as the Industrial Revolution.

Since 2002 more calls were made from a mobile phone than from a fixed network, many developing nations now start with a mobile phone network. The variety of ways in which the mobile phone has been used was not predicted when the technology was conceived. This is especially true in the pervasiveness of text messaging. Never in a million years would the creators of mobile phone technology have predicted that text messaging would be used to keep in contact with friends or as a method of entry to competitions on television. Disruptive technology can work both ways, it depends on whether you are doing the disruption or being disrupted.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a triangular model that describes the relationship between basic needs, such as food and drink, at the bottom and emotional and creative needs at the top. As wealth is generated, the amount of available resources increases. At this point populations tend to spend more money on their emotions and need for knowledge than on the necessities of life. As a result of this Robin believes that the pyramid will effectively invert, with creative needs at the bottom and need for necessities nearer the top.

Research considers the societal shift as having six areas. The Mosaic society talks about the fragmented lifestyle; it has a more complex social life that needs simplicity in daily chores. The collective society belongs to groups and the discovery society needs to grow in knowledge, hence the pervasiveness of blogs and mashups. As the population of the world grows and the average age in the developed world increases, a caring society is required. The sixth area is known as the sustainable society, this group maintain the response to areas such as climate change.

Viral wireless media distribution is an emerging technology where your personal computer could interrogate other local machines for information the user might need, such as road directions. In the future people may be tagged and their movement patterns monitored. Another future development could be augmented reality; a computer could overlay a virtual game onto the real world. This technology could combine the health benefits of exercising with the entertainment value of a virtual world. People often struggle to understand paper maps so overlaying data onto real street scenes could be another use for augmented reality.

There are a number of technologies that are starting to come together, all of which could help inform position and be a part of the future geospatial.

Questions	Answers