THE 2012 LOCATION INTELLIGENCE CONFERENCE

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The Conference was a testament to the growing use and significance of location data across myriad applications of business and personal life

The two-day Location Intelligence and Oracle Spatial User Conference was held this past May 22 and 23, at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, two blocks east of the White House, in beautiful Washington, DC.

Its 65 presentations covered a variety of topics, including analytics/decision support, big data, open standards, and the cloud. The diversity of topics presented was a testament to the importance of location to many areas of business and personal life.

My talk, titled "Fight the waddle and get more people on your map," described the evolution of consumer mapping, identified a few shortcomings with current mashup designs, and finished with a few "faster & simpler" solutions to keep consumers happy.

Google presented their geo strategy of "Delivering Data to Users – Anywhere," rooted in their maps and Earth platforms. This strategy is heavy on visualisation for large audiences, and very light on analytics or data management.

My June column challenged Google to expand on their "store locator" strategy. But their conference presentation convinced me that their current strategy, which, so far, has attracted an audience of over 1 billion users worldwide, is a good fit for what is really a $40-billion ad company. And to attract even more users, their satellite coverage now offers sub-metre accuracy to more than 75 per cent of the world's population. Consumer mapping can be so much more, but it seems we'll have to look to OpenStreetMap and others to take it to the next level.

Jeff Joyner delivered a compelling presentation about OnStar, General Motors location-aware, personal assistant for your car, which last year served 43 million calls (up from 3,000, when it started in 1996). Its Injury Severity Prediction (ISP) system monitors vehicle events that can suggest an accident has occurred (e.g. airbag deployed, vehicle rolled over etc). If necessary, it can also call an OnStar dispatcher, without any driver intervention, and relay incident details and vehicle location. Jeff gave a compelling scenario where a vehicle skids off the road and down a ravine, knocking the driver unconscious, and then settles out of sight of other passers-by. In this scenario, OnStar's ISP system could save a life.

The data collected from OnStar's 6 million subscribers (250,000 in China alone) is a gold mine for trend analysis, some of which Jeff shared with his audience.

Peter Doolan from Oracle discussed the costs of complex, multi-vendor location solutions. Product features might be a sales aid, but they exponentially increase complexity, reducing utility, information accessibility and opportunity to innovate.

He finished with a description of Oracle's engineered stack, which delivers integrated location solutions built from Solaris servers, Oracle Spatial, middleware and applications. The solution might be a bit self-serving, but I think their message was an honest one: to deliver the power of place, drive complexity out of your IT equation.

Or, in short: keep it simple.

The last presentation I attended was by Philip O'Doherty from eSpatial, which offers a "keep it simple" service that lets novice users visualise data geographically, segment, analyse and share results. They were particularly careful to position themselves as neither GIS, location intelligence, SaaS nor big data.

For a complete list of presentations and slides, please visit http://www.locationintelligence.net/presentations/2012/