



Changing Thoughts about Time

Time has unique meaning to those of us in the GI profession. This was made apparent to me while having dinner with another colleague recently who is not in the GI field but is interested in linguistics.

As we chatted I noticed her becoming quiet and looking rather subdued as I carried on about GI. I was speaking about location based servicing and the importance of time, how people want to know where events and entities are in a timely manner. How pizza could be delivered quicker and warmer using LBS and how delivery services can be monitored and deliveries expedited if one knows where and when their delivery vehicles are.

This then led to another discussion about determining when a static map becomes an animation or visualization. Time is involved when thinking about maps on a continuum ranging from static hardcopy maps or compute images as compared to real-time data collection and the representation of that information. My thought was that geo-data reaches a point during the representational phase when it naturally becomes an animation or visualization – if it is to be represented. After all, with all these geo-technologies we have today and their capabilities to continually capture and provide large data sets, animation and visualization are the outcomes.

About this time during the course of the meal I asked, "do you think you understand more with animations and visualizations"? She replied, "it depends upon what is being represented and if she has time to think about it". I could not disagree with her viewpoint but wondered just the same what she meant by 'think about it' and I asked. Discussion ensued over what a map is supposed to do and how a map can cause one to quickly think (or not think) about content of the map. As we discussed this subject further it became clearer that thinking about a map is the process of trying to determine what message the map is

delivering and if it is useful. Time is an issue in this process. If it takes too much time to decipher the message then how it may be useful really does not figure into the equation. Studies have shown this to be true, people move onto something else.

Just before leaving I asked, "do you look at many maps or animations on the WWW"? She replied; "not really, they seem to take forever to see, I don't have the time – but I wish I could". Later she indicated she accesses the internet using a modem and that her computer is not very speedy. This got me thinking on my way home that many of us in GI work on systems performing GI tasks daily but we do not think about time enough. The systems

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Jeff Thurston (jeff@integralgis.com), Director
Integral GIS, Inc.

we use are fast in our offices or workplaces but many viewers and (potential) users have limitations that do not permit them to participate. This obviously raises the question – what is to be done about that? In part the user can purchase a better system and in part, fast telecommunications are necessary between all users. But in part - cartographers need to be aware of time more. There is no time like now to begin!