

OGC's column for the December, 1996 issue of GIS World

## **Strategic Membership for Nations and Regions**

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From the Open GIS Consortium's beginning, it has sought international members to: 1) ensure that the OpenGIS Specification meets all nations' needs and becomes internationally accepted; and 2) maximize business opportunities for all of OGC's technology providers and maximize technology access for all of OGC's users, without regard to nationality. OGC's international membership has now grown to 25 non-US members, one-third of OGC's membership (as of October 1, 1996), and OGC now has sufficient international experience and resources to begin formalizing its international organization and programs.

### **EUROGI Head on OGC's Board**

On June 14, 1996 Michael Brand, President of EUROGI, the European Umbrella Organization of GI Associations, was elected to the OGC Board of Directors. Mr. Brand brings vast experience with European and international GI organizations: he well understands the European situation and has shown a longstanding commitment to coordination, data sharing, and interoperability in the GI domain across Europe. As a Director, Mr. Brand will help ensure that European technology producers and technology users become full partners in our activities, and he will bring wisdom to the Board's deliberation of international issues in general.

### **Issues of International Organization**

OGC's staff and the International Subcommittee of the Management Committee have been discussing a broad range of ideas with OGC members in Japan, Europe, Canada, and Australia. There is general agreement about the need for region-focused and perhaps in some cases nation-focused groups, programs, and meetings. Issues being discussed include: the missions of regional and national groups; coordination between these groups and OGC's current Board, Management Committee, and Technical Committee; international representation in those OGC bodies; division and sharing of responsibilities, resources, and fees; and addressing regional and national needs through Strategic Memberships. These discussions have been positive and there is desire on the part of all participants to build OGC into a truly international organization. Significant decisions are likely in the next few months.

### **Strategic Membership**

Major Geospatial Information Communities should be aware of OGC's activities: In the second half of 1997, different vendors' OpenGIS Specification-compliant geoprocessing software products will be serving each other's requests for simple features and feature collections using functions such as intersect, union, subtract, and select by attribute, location or topological relation. OGC's process will generate cross-vendor interoperability for Earth images just as it has done for features. Similar work will be done for network services such as catalog services for data discovery, and then for semantic translators to automate the integration of semantically heterogeneous data.

Major Information Communities, including groups who cooperate and share information within or between nations, have a stake in the specification work described above. Through Strategic Membership in OGC, a nation, a cooperating

group of nations, an industry association (for banking, logistics, transportation, etc.), a Fortune 500 company, or an international organization, can: 1) solicit a comprehensive, detailed matrix of applicable current and projected geoprocessing technologies, 2) get expert help in creating community-wide geospatial information architectures, 3) establish, with vendors, standard interface specifications that will lead to highly differentiated, use-specific, competitive but interoperable products, 4) establish prototyping facilities, and 5) request other kinds of help from OGC.

OGC's focus in all cases is on the user. As the supply of technology increases, it has nowhere to go but toward user needs, which may indeed be potentially great but which are not always obvious and quantifiable by vendors or easy for a user to convey simultaneously to all candidate vendors.

There is a unique advantage to users of housing such a market forum inside a consortium like OGC: an open interface specification can be created if a user's technology requirement can be more effectively met by such a specification than by a single product or collection of products cobbled together from a few vendors. In OGC, vendors work together to do most of the work of creating open interface specifications, motivated by the business opportunities that open interfaces create. An interface specification created in OGC for a major Information Community could be an extension of the OpenGIS Specification or another industry standard, or it could possibly be a separate and independent specification. It may serve only the needs of a single Information Community or have broader applicability for other Information Communities.

As discussed by experts at the Emerging GSDI Conference September 4-6 in Bonn, Germany (see <http://www2.nas.edu/earthmap>), every country's NSDI has academic, legal, governmental, social, and cultural as well as technological and commercial dimensions. The GSDI is a web of linkages between these domains as they exist in different countries. OGC's view is that geoprocessing technology and commerce are the “hub” of a truly global GSDI, that these elements of the GSDI will race forward due to market forces, and that participation in OGC is the best way for national and regional interests to track this progress, shape it, and put it to use in local contexts.

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