

Whatâ€™s in a Name?



Who are we? Who are you? The constant churn and arrival of new technologies and inevitable trade and professional groupings means rebranding our industry and ourselves from time to time, says Adena Schutzberg. But just how important is it?

As I write this in May, two geo-related events are in full swing. There's the Imaging & Geospatial Technology Forum and what next year will be known as Xponential. The former is also known as the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS) 2015 Annual Conference. The latter is currently known as Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI) Unmanned Systems.

The new event names are part of a rebranding of the geo-technology marketplace that has been going on for some time. Most of us in the industry can make sense of photogrammetry and remote sensing but surely "Imaging & Geospatial Technology" is easier to say. And, perhaps more importantly, those terms may be more decipherable to our family and friends, students and potential clients.

AUVSI may be a new acronym to some in the geospatial arena, but the precursor to the current organization launched in 1972. Today, the unmanned technology is part of our quiver of platforms for what ASPRS and others call imaging technology. Why the change from acronym to made-up-term for the conference and trade show? I suspect the various acronyms related to small remotely controlled devices (UAV and UAS among others) are not as warm and fuzzy as the event organizers, who serve device vendors and supporting companies, would like. Thus, the branding team chose a name that had nothing to do with flying or remote sensing or geospatial, but rather with math. The not so subtle implication for sponsors and attendees of Xponential 2016: exponential growth in the event, the market and profit margins!

Rebranding

These changes are just the latest of a steady re-branding stream in motion for last 20 years or so. In 1998, Automated Mapping/Facilities Management (AM/FM) International, which hosted an event of the same name, became the Geospatial Information and Technology Association (GITA). That name has remained until today, though the organization and its events have changed significantly. In 1999 GIS World, at one time the only regularly published print publication I read, became GeoWorld. The Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA) maintains its organization moniker from back in 1966, but added the tagline "The Association for GIS Professionals" in 2010. Its annual conference was rebranded as GIS-Pro that same year.

It's telling that Environmental Systems Research Institute, once known as ESRI and pronounced in a particular way, is now Esri. It no longer expands and can be pronounced as one prefers. The Esri International User Conference is now the Esri User Conference. Other Esri industry events no longer include "user" in their names. The Esri Education User Conference is now the Esri Education GIS Conference. Today I was invited to the Esri AEC Summit.

Names Do Matter

Earlier this year discussions yielded a name for a Canadian geospatial organization: GeoAlliance. The name and the process by which it was determined has prompted quite a bit of conversation, reinforcing the idea that organization and event names really do matter. While some find discussions of names a pointless exercise; the final selection impacts the individuals and groups the organization or event in question may engage, support, represent or from whom they may ask for funding.

The most positive takeaway from all of these event, company and organization name changes is that ultimately each of us, individually, decides how to describe what we do. In some companies, each staffer determines the title on the business card in their wallet. In others, there's a corporate convention to be followed. Perhaps the best solution is the simplest: the business card with no title at all. That forces the individual to articulate a title or short statement describing what they do or have to offer.

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