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Women in Location Interview

SPECIAL SECTION – INTERVIEW OF AMY FOBES By LBx
Editor, Natasha Leger | Published March 11, 2013

What does location intelligence mean to you?

Location intelligence (LI) provides a data rich understanding of the world around us. We are all familiar with the catchphrase, “Location is all that matters. Location, location, location!” However, until recently, the amount of accessible information for analyzing our world from a micro to a macro level was trapped within incompatible data warehouses. In short, we could collect lots of data but we could not enable that data for timely and actionable insight.

Due to rapid advances on the forefront of geographic information systems (GIS), not only can we now access data in any file format, in near real-time but we can create decision-making charts, diagrams, maps and infographics with the touch of a few keystrokes. The power of information at our fingertips for decision-making is unprecedented. The most exciting aspect of location intelligence is that these dynamic tools and applications are available not just to the media, executives or government entities- but these applications are impacting our day-to-day lives; the way we think, travel, work and socialize.

How did you get into location intelligence?

For the past twenty years, my career has been focused on sales, marketing and business analytics. I was fortunate to have been introduced to and work for ESRI, one of the global GIS providers. While working in the professional services and sales departments at ESRI, I also spent extensive time studying GIS and attending their client training courses. I learned about the level of complexity required to conduct valid and reliable spatial analysis. I also worked at Sun Microsystems on an information dashboard tool and have worked for a small boutique technology company that specialized in the development of

location intelligence data processing tools. I have seen phenomenal changes in the geo-tech industry during my career, especially in the last five years.

As computing power for enabling data increased, the formerly niche GIS industry evolved to support new business requirements for location intelligence beyond making maps to designing robust decision-making applications. Best of breed organizations have been the early adopters of location intelligence for competing, responding and thriving within an extremely interdependent hyper-local and global economy. What happens locally truly impacts us globally.

As the marketplace became flooded with new LI tools, GIS leaders within their respective organizations became overloaded with requests for delivering more reports and more analytics, faster. To support this demand, a frenzy of grabbing at new LI tools incited investment approvals at the executive level with the hope of achieving an innovative competitive advantage. However, few organizations were prepared to step back and build a strategic plan for capitalizing on new LI technology tools. Additionally, easy to use interfaces minimized the level of complexity required for conducting valid and reliable spatial analysis. The result-new LI tools failed to connect the organization or support innovation. LI tools designed to increase efficiencies drained budgets, slowed down expected speed to adoption and frustrated silos of subject matter experts who needed information fast.

In response to these issues, I launched geoCommunica, an advisory service for organizations to learn about and understand how to connect geo-technology tools across an organization. I focus on helping companies avoid common pitfalls, save money and achieve return-on-investment when building, deploying and capitalizing on location intelligence through geo-tech strategic planning and geo-tech competitive analysis.

How does location intelligence inspire?

LI inspires us to make interdisciplinary connections and share what we know about the world around us.

How does location-based thinking improve business, the world, society and the economy?

Taking a retrospective look at the global financial crisis, would we have made the same decisions if we had access to the information we have access to today?

Location intelligence improves business, the world, and the economy because it enables us collectively to make smarter, faster decisions. LI allows you to be more responsive versus reactive to shifts and changes.

What is your role relative to location in your position?

I focus on helping companies avoid common pitfalls associated with building and deploying location intelligence technologies. Some of the common pitfalls for implementing LI tools are: 1) wasting budget on redundant data costs 2) not connecting geo-tech tools to business processes and 3) confusing spatial analytic expertise with map makers.

As a geo-tech advisor my job is to ensure organizations avoid these pitfalls by working to connect silos of knowledge experts among IT, sales and marketing departments. Bridging gaps among knowledge experts requires a geo-tech strategy, creating a technology focused communication plan and conducting competitive analysis. These steps are critical to saving money and achieving the desired return-on-investment with location intelligence initiatives.

What is the future of location intelligence?

The future of LI is terabytes, terabytes and terabytes of spatial data. Welcome to the world of the yottabyte.

How does location intelligence benefit women in the world?

The more informed we are as individuals and as a society the more empowered we are make impactful changes. Fact based analysis makes us more responsive versus reactive. The visualization of information, through LI, provides us with a new way of understanding our world and communicating with each other.



Are You Ready for the New Geo-Social Economy?

LOCATION AWARENESS IS YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

By Amy Fobes | Published June 22, 2011

Unlike any other time in history, businesses and consumers now have access to geographical tools, social media platforms and mobile devices for sharing vast amounts of data at an unprecedented pace. Leveraging these location services offers businesses new ways to identify, engage and capitalize on previously overlooked economic geographies of opportunity, giving rise to a new geo-social economy that spans the globe, yet directly impacts local markets.

Being competitive in this new economy has made location awareness a critical core competency for every industry. Location awareness is changing how businesses make decisions, manage risks and obtain hyper-local insight. The challenge for every business in this economy is determining how to be smart with its investments and its use of location intelligence.

Success with location intelligence is a combination of enterprise vision, specific business objectives, and often-times the ability to orchestrate an organization's cacophony of IT investments. This combination requires evaluation of technology tools and test data sources for alignment with business objectives, accuracy and reliability.

With any new buzzwords, such as location intelligence, it is often vendors and

consultants who are attached to particular technology platforms, whose voices represent the majority of evangelizing and educating on the latest must-have solution. As a result, strategic thinkers are often challenged with rising above the sales hype and required to conduct time-consuming benchmarks in order to research and test one solution against another. Imagine an independent “business lab” that would foster the opportunity to develop and collaborate on innovative ideas around the practical uses of technology, tools and data, before making costly investments.

Rarely does any one business have the right people, data and technology tools in place to design and implement successful analytics for driving game-changing strategies across the enterprise. Instead, many costly, disparate and small-scale projects that often lead to a duplication of effort are initiated. In addition, a lack of an enterprise roadmap results in further stressing an already over-burdened IT department with new requirements.

To focus on innovation, collaboration and education of location intelligence, a new community of business leaders has formed to launch The Location Forum, a non-profit industry association whose objective is to offer a “business lab” on the forefront of driving business applications that depend on geo-social technologies. Members of the Forum are addressing and overcoming common misconceptions and barriers to success for the implementation of location intelligence solutions. The founding members include a wide range of companies across several industries, including real estate, retail, communications, location, data and data analytics, financial services, and asset management.

Despite all the websites and publications that refer to location intelligence as LBS, GPS, GIS, “geospatial solutions” or “business intelligence,” there is no single objective common venue for resources on how to implement the location dimension to any business’s strategy, operations or service portfolio until the launch of The Location Forum’s “business lab.” A location intelligence “business lab” offers all companies an opportunity to accelerate their competitive

advantages by developing and exchanging best practices on the use of geo-location solutions.

Imagine an independent ‘business lab’ that would foster the opportunity to develop and collaborate on innovative ideas around the practical uses of technology, tools and data, before making costly investments.

With a cross-section of expertise and perspective, members are able to tackle every business problem from any angle and produce relevant, cutting-edge projects that can be readily utilized, applied and implemented into a business setting. Initial projects have included best-practice reports, guidebooks and frameworks designed to answer many strategic and operational location intelligence business questions for making smarter decisions on technology and data investments. The Forum’s “business lab” is a practical solution for bringing peers together to investigate, evaluate and vet their options for creating new competitive advantages with location services and applications. The main objective of The Location Forum is to establish a business platform for the exchange of ideas and to develop new approaches for innovation, collaboration and education of location awareness:

- **Innovate:** With developments occurring at blinding speed, the Forum provides a venue for exchanging breakthrough ideas about the new opportunities – and challenges – associated with location from a business perspective.
- **Collaborate:** Acting as a community, the Forum enables like-minded professionals to join together, solve problems and share their results with other members and the industry at large.
- **Educate:** Because location is an emerging area with little documented experience, the Forum acts as a knowledge hub, offering a range of information resources, pointers and mentoring connections that in turn feed the industry’s momentum.

Many businesses know they need to incorporate location intelligence into their business strategies but are often wary of costly innovations or experiments that may not yield a clear business benefit. As a result, many companies remain stuck in a largely observatory mode, which often results in watching their window of opportunity close.

While all successful companies rely on R&D for experimentation and innovation, we seem to have entered an era of increased risk aversion. Yet, without innovation, how does a company maintain a competitive advantage in a rapidly shifting economy? The real challenge for organizations today is to identify a practical path to innovation. Location solutions are moving at warp speed. Business success is predicated on when to act and when to wait. This is a time for action. As the noted Norwegian economist Trygve Haavelmo has observed, “There are two types of experiments. Those we should make and those which we merely watch as passive observers.” (Source: HBR, A Step-By-Step Guide To Smart Business Decisions, March 2011.)

Whether you are new to the concepts of location awareness or a seasoned veteran of the location industry, you cannot afford to be passive about the power of location. The Location Forum is the first organization to provide a business platform to discuss innovations and practical approaches for positioning your company for success in the new geo-social economy.

The Geo-Technology Marketer

MARKETING LOCATION INTELLIGENCE WITHIN THE ENTERPRISE By Amy Fobes | Published December 22, 2011

Location Intelligence (LI) captures the attention and excitement of executives by solving longstanding data challenges and achieving unprecedented speed-to-insight with fact-based, actionable and timely reports accessed through dynamic web interfaces. Many corporations readily agree that LI is becoming a necessary component for strategic planning and winning market share; and many have already made significant investments in LI and are recognizing that the investment is not only one in technology, but in internal marketing. Aligning the organization and facilitating the culture to embrace new ways of doing business requires an expert geo-technology marketer who has experience with and understands the communication strategies and tactics needed to educate, train and support sales objectives with new technology tools and services.

A common language and marketing plan around LI and its role within the organization closes communication gaps that often exist between departments. The departmental silo has been a long-standing challenge within organizations to sharing information and adopting any new technology changes and initiatives. Coordination across the various departments is critical to leveraging investments in LI and expanding the features and functions of the enterprise.

How to Market and Sell LI

Facilitating organizational change and aligning departments with a new way of doing business is achieved when marketing brings coherent messages to silos of knowledge workers who need education, training and sales support to understand how any new tool or service will benefit their role. In other words, just because management has decided to invest in location intelligence as a competitive advantage, does not mean the rest of the organization is aligned to execute new ways of doing business.

To accelerate the operational tempo of marketing tactics and facilitate the swift adoption of location intelligence initiatives around new technology tools and services, the geo-technology marketer ensures everyone is on the same page by tracking and measuring success stories while also analyzing technical issues and sales challenges. This specialized marketer is tightly networked across the organization to capture bottom up innovations while managing the top down flow of communication.

What is a Geo-Technology Marketer?

The geo-technology marketer is a seasoned marketing technologist with the ability to navigate an organization and connect people, data and technology to the enterprise analytic platform and business ecosystem. The geo-technology marketer distinguishes how the organization can leverage their location intelligence solutions to become smarter, faster and more innovative than the competition.

The Geo-Technology Marketer Checklist

Qualifications, Roles and Leading Responsibilities

- Strong sales and marketing background in the spatial, high-technology industry for the commercial sector.
- Experience working with both vendors of LI products/services and clients who have implemented successful LI solutions.
- Comprehension of the scientific methodologies, algorithms and analytics behind the LI modules.
- Current and historical business acumen of BI, GIS, CRM, Social Media and LI dataset and tools flooding the marketplace and understanding how these technology tools connect to people and data across the enterprise technology platform.
- Training and proficient use of various location intelligence technology tools.
- Ability to interview and capture the LI business requirements from a vast array of knowledge workers, such as: sales, marketing, IT, analysts, product developers and C-level strategists.
- Ability to translate business requirements from each department into LI products for servicing various lines of business.
- Understanding of software development and project management

processes for the design and deployment of LI products and services such as SCRUM, Agile and Lean Startup methodologies.

- Innovative thinking and competitive insight for creating new LI products and services which will streamline operations, fill gaps in the marketplace and beat the competition.
- Tracking, analyzing and measuring demonstrated ROI with successful new technology tools and services.

The Common Pitfalls and Risks of Location Intelligence Investments

There are many common internal and customer facing pitfalls and risks associated with LI investments that can arise from the absence of an internal strategic marketing plan. Internal, organizational risks include:

- Development of conflicting stories about features, functions and benefits of new innovations by departmental silos;
- A failure to educate or train employees with a common message leads to confusion over technology goals and objectives and worse, duplication of IT efforts within silos;
- Over-simplifying LI products and services and the “magic bullet” myth: Simple web interfaces and ease of use often masks the analytical sophistication and complexity (or lack thereof) of a solution. It is critically important that the sales and account management teams are trained on the scientific methodologies and data sources at play in the background which support more informed fact-based analysis. Otherwise, clients are often left with a show of dazzling lights and yet, no light bulbs are going off for them on how the technology is aligned with their business objectives to save money or mitigate risks.

These internal missteps can lead to customer-facing risks such as:

- Sales documents and presentations that are distributed to potential customers that promote what are believed to be the key distinguishers but leave the organization sounding like everyone else;
- Sales people who are not prepared to overcome objections within their presentations because they do not understand how to competitively position the innovation. This leaves the company

vulnerable to the competition as clients seek answers elsewhere. Poorly conceived sales presentations can result in clients perceiving and concluding that your organization lacks innovation, or worse, is late to the game in comparison to your competition.

Capitalizing on the Competitive Advantages of Location Intelligence

In today's fast-paced technology environment, you can count on your competition striving to outpace you within the next few weeks, days or hours. As a result, the geo-technology marketer has become a critical role to maintain an organization's focus on the delivery of timely LI innovations and rapidly capitalize on new products and services for outperforming the competition. Do you have a geo-technology marketer on your team?

PROFILE

Amy Fobes is the founder of Geocommunications. As a digital strategist and location intelligence advisor, she has connected Fortune 500 companies to the geo-social economy. She helps organizations win market share by achieving their operational and sales objectives with location intelligence. She has twenty years of experience in sales, marketing and business analytics with an emphasis on the education and promotion of location technology products and services. She has a B.A. from Hamilton College.