Elmbridge Interview with James Rutter

Introduction

Elmbridge Borough Council is located South West of London in Surrey and falls within the M25 ring. It is a mix of leafy suburbs, countryside and towns, including Walton-On-Thames, Esher and Cobham. Bisected by the A307, the total area of the borough is approximately 96 square kilometres.

Elmbridge has a population of roughly 120,000 people and includes 56,000 properties. The Council's main offices are located in Esher.

Purchase Date

Elmbridge Borough Council placed their first order for Cadcorp SIS – Spatial Information System in 2003.

Products Ordered

4 x Map Manager on Desktop PCs
3 x Map Manager on Tablet PCs
2 x Map Modeller on Desktop PCs
1 x mSIS
1 x Active Server Component (ASC), for Web-based GIS

Elmbridge also use copies of Map Browser and Map Reader, which are freely downloadable products. The latter is for printing complex images as well as acting as a failsafe should the Web-Server ever fail.

Elmbridge also use the MVM 20/20 suite, which is deployed on top of separately purchased Cadcorp GIS software.

Which departments use Cadcorp SIS?

Desktop licences serve: Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health, Client Services

Web-based GIS serves: Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health, Client Services, Legal Services and Leisure Services.

What were your reasons for purchasing Cadcorp SIS?

Elmbridge had various administrative problems with their existing GIS software. The requirement to translate all their data to integrate it within the software was a burden and caused technical difficulties. Stability of the software was worrisome and a strategic Web-based GIS implementation was proving unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. This made continuation with the existing system largely untenable.

Cadcorp SIS was identified as an ideal replacement for a number of reasons. Speed was one. Elmbridge has found Cadcorp SIS extremely quick to load, integrate and display disparate data sources. The fact that there is no need to translate data when reading it into the system has made living with Cadcorp SIS "almost too easy" according to James Rutter, Elmbridge Councils, GIS Manager.

Cadcorp SIS is considered to be a stable product by Elmbridge. It is totally Windows compliant; "we can plug Cadcorp into anything we want too in terms of

data sources; be they GIS files, images, databases, point data, spread-sheets and so on. We have hardly any problems doing this, or with the reliability and robustness of the software" he added.

Cadcorp SIS and the implementation of OS MasterMap

Support for OS MasterMap was extremely important and the strength of the Cadcorp SIS in terms of ease of use, efficiency and cost proved compelling. James Rutter explained: "At Elmbridge, we were looking for a cost effective and efficient means of handling OS Mastermap. Cadcorp tools have made our OS Mastermap management very simple. If we choose, we can view GZIP files on the fly, simply by dragging and dropping them into Cadcorp SIS. It is themed and scale thresholded automatically, so we don't have to waste any time. Cadcorp have even supplied us with an additional filter to make OS Mastermap emulate OS Land-line, useful for those who only have access to mono laser jet printers. However, OS Mastermap is supplied in GML and GML is verbose in nature. To use large volumes of GML requires database technology. Initially we had OS Mastermap loaded into an Access database and stored on a network server. To maximise OS Mastermap performance, we have now implemented Oracle technology and hold 1.2 million TOIDs. The great thing is that Cadcorp writes directly to Oracle without having to buy any additional software. It uses the power of Oracle for data storage, indexing and retrieval. Our GIS infrastructure is kept simple and costs are kept down. And, with OS Mastermap stored in an open, generic format within Oracle, this means it's accessible by other systems".

How does Cadcorp SIS make any tasks easier?

"Speed. This is of paramount importance" explained James Rutter. He identified the speed and ease of map production for planning committee meetings as a classic example of how Cadcorp SIS, coupled with the plethora of the freely available Cadcorp 'productivity tools' can do the job with the minimum of fuss.

"The lack of need for data translation is invaluable. It saves us time, cuts storage overheads and demonstrates what interoperability is all about. Cadcorp SIS does what it says on the box", Rutter continued.

What are Cadcorp like to work with?

James Rutter has found Cadcorp "good to do business with. The company is very accommodating. I know the people I deal with and enjoy direct contact with them. Cadcorp reacts positively to input and has worked alongside us on projects involving AGI's MetaGenie and Ordnance Survey 'Skunkworks''' Project Magnesium. Cadcorp offers extensive development expertise that we have found extremely useful and reasonably priced".

What complaints do you have?

"Web-based GIS has always been an important part of our plans" answered James Rutter. "Initially I was scared off from Cadcorp SIS ASC. What I originally saw demonstrated was good, but without the benefit of hindsight, I wasn't convinced it was a true, boxed product. I feared how I, the user, would be able to achieve the same results. Now, having tried a competitor's offering, had great problems with it and returned to the ASC, I have found that it is easy for developers to use, easy to install, easy to administer. Furthermore, if you don't want to do it in-house Cadcorp can develop a solution for you quickly and for a reasonable price. So, in essence, my complaint is that Cadcorp should play more on the ease of use and advantages of their Web products."

What future plans do you have for the software?

“Because the Web is our main method of publishing map information we want to finalise our data input and finish the creation of our metadata”, stated James Rutter. “The latter is mundane, but critical. We have many overlays of common data which vary slightly. It is essential to have the descriptive information associated with it so we know what it is. Once complete we will point all our internal users through to MetaGenie at the national GIGateway site. We have the tools to create metadata with Cadcorp SIS that is fully compatible with this national standard – so why do our own. It is what interoperability is all about”.

He then added: “We also plan to further enhance our corporate Website. We want to add reporting capabilities, enhanced gazettering, more spatial analysis and possible port the site over to the new Cadcorp SIS Web solution, GeognoSIS.NET”.