

# <2017>

ON LOCATION



## DOWN FOR THE COUNT?

THE LESSON OF 2016 IS THAT WE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO FIGHT IGNORANCE AND FEAR, SAYS ALISTAIR MACLENAN

So, farewell then 2016. You can say whatever you like about the past 12 months but you cannot accuse them of being dull. Sadly, we lost many great people from the worlds of arts, politics, science, television and sport. In the case of boxing, we lost 'The Greatest'.

But, no matter the achievements of the people whose lives ended in 2016, the year will undoubtedly be remembered for the outcomes of two political events – the UK voting to leave the European Union and the US Presidential Election.

In the April edition of GeoConnexion International, I wrote an article in support of the UK remaining in the EU. I based my argument on the need to stay in the Copernicus project but that was a vehicle for my continuing belief that people are much less likely to fear each other if they meet, work and live together. Fear is so often based on ignorance, which allows stories to fill the void.

Throughout the past year, I have been fortunate to attend very many geo-based conferences, seminars and exhibitions held in different countries around the world. I sat and learnt how geo-data, software and expertise is being combined to address problems in just about every walk of life. Some were utterly fascinating, some were a test of stamina and some were an attempt on the to beat the Guinness World Record for the most words on a single PowerPoint slide (how many times do I have to say it – no more than five words to a slide!).

But every single one of them was trying to provide people with insight. Whatever geo-based technique was being presented, the end result was that I left thinking about big subjects such as the threats to people's lives or to the environment that sustains those lives, how the energy and food that everyone needs to survive will be produced, or how people will live together in ever-expanding and increasingly densely populated cities.

Being able to provide insight like this that can be used to have a tangible effect on people's lives is a remarkable talent. There aren't many other industries that can do it so widely. Insight is much more than information – it is 'information plus plus plus' (I may have stolen that from somewhere). Insight is a path that allows people to make better decisions because it adds emotion, reality and people (the pluses) to the information that it presents.

At a conference in November, I watched a presenter break down as he gave his talk. He explained that in a long career of military service and work as an imagery analyst, the resolution of the data he had always used had never been sufficient to see people. The battlefields and their aftermaths he had seen from space had always shown blurry cars or houses. Now, as he described how Syrian refugee families were existing – living is too strong a word – in Greek camps and the conditions that could be inferred from the imagery at which we were all looking, the insight he had provided became too much for him and for many people in the room.

That's what insight can do. It can bring otherwise remote issues to life. As I said, insight creates emotion and the fastest way to change the way someone thinks, it to change the way they feel.

As 2017 rolls around, it may be that we face a world that values promises over expert advice. But I implore everyone who works in the geo-industry to continue and to expand the insight you provide to the world. It may well be ignored by the majority but if you don't keep doing what you're doing, then that one person who needs it won't have it. And then we are in trouble.

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