



Map Link The Comprehensive Source of Maps & Geographic Information
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Michael Goodchild
UCSB
Santa Barbara, CA

Dear Dr. Goodchild,

Thank you for squeezing me in to the Digital Gazetteer workshop at such short notice.

As you know, Map Link is unique. We maintain an inventory of thousands of map and atlases from every corner of the globe. In the process of buying and re-selling this material Map Link must collect and manage metadata for every item. This means every sheet in a set of topographic maps. We collect basic data such as: scale, sheet size, format, date of edition, sheet name, a simple LC classification; as well as data relating to acquisition, cost and sales information, and a thumb-nail image of each map for display purposes. We have metadata for over 90,000 different maps and atlases.

Each of the three workshop components is an area Map Link has had at least some experience that may prove interesting, if not valuable to the discussion.

“Interoperable gazetteer services”

Map Link has tested a variety of database management tools to effectively store and manage map metadata internally. In the last few years our Internet presence has come to offer the full range of our holdings. As you might imagine, this presents us with many challenges, so our approach was to limit direct sales to resellers. These resellers presumably knew how to lookup the products they needed. Yet, I think we always knew the key to sales is in replicating the inquiry of a good map dealer, or librarian, in getting to the needed item quickly and efficiently. Our commercial demands occasionally mirror the conditions other managers of spatial data may face. Indeed, I believe we have a lot to learn from each other, particularly in the way users approach the data. Gazetteers, properly designed and deployed, are one key tool for efficient data lookup.

“Components of gazetteer services”

We have experimented with some advanced indexing and metadata collection techniques. When we first began to collect data for the Internet it was for a Geosystems (now Mapquest.com) retail web store in 1997. In addition to the foregoing metadata, we also started recording lat/long coordinate values for each sheet. As many of the maps we sell use an unmanageable or undetectable grid system, we also began to set down a list of important place names for these sheets. This rapidly became an untenable prospect, and we backed off to simply record the already mentioned metadata.

“Georeferencing as a process”

Today, Map Link maintains an inventory database with very simple and limited query tools. Now that our new, direct-to-the-consumer web site is becoming fully populated, this consumer (data user, etc) expects more intelligence and more natural search tools. We expect to be using digital gazetteers to aid in product lookup. We have already begun to recognize many issues that may be of interest to your group. We will be listening for new ideas!

My background has always been in the commercial, or private sector of the map business, but I have worked closely with mapping agencies, standards boards, and spatial data committees. Currently I manage publishing, data acquisition, and national mapping product acquisition at Map Link. Since our business is in buying and re-selling hard-copy maps from publishers all around the world, this puts us in contact with every map publisher and map-issuing agency. In addition, since we sell hard-copy topo mapping for the entire planet, we acquire this material directly from each national mapping agency. As we continue to manage our contacts with each of these, they may prove useful in obtaining place name information, and metadata to further the digital gazetteer initiative.

My long-term work with geographic names authorities and standards committees is a function of representing the map industry and their interests. Most map publishers sincerely want to provide the user with the best information possible, but lack the knowledge and direction. A presentation by a representative from Google Earth at a recent Council of Geographic Names Authorities meeting in Boulder illustrated this fact. The results of your workshop will be reported back to map publishers and other spatial data providers around the world.

The Council of Geographic Names Authorities, The United Nations Group of Experts in Geographic Names, The International Cartographic Association, and other groups have welcomed and encouraged my participation so that I may report back to the users of this material--namely, the publishers and users. Having worked with these groups, I understand the availability and many of the design features of data sets around the world.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to participate in this important workshop.

Regards,
Will Tefft
Map Link