

My experience with gazetteers has spanned my careers as an educator, executive of a mapping company and as a central component in my consulting practice (TeleMapics).

I have practical experience in creating geographic gazetteers, indexes and in the problems and potentials in deciding “appropriate” name forms and publishing policies governing their use at Rand McNally & Company. Rand’s business was international and I was exposed to the pressures of “commercially-based name preferences”, as well as politically charged “naming” issues across the world. During my tenure at Rand, I licensed data to Getty for their Geographical Thesaurus and had discussions with a number of companies interested in geographic names and their use for purposes far beyond the world of maps. Perhaps of more interest, I was with the company when the name systems were automated for our internal use.

In my consulting career, which is focused on Local Search and Location Based Services, I have found that geographic gazetteers are an area of interest to all of the major players in Local Search, as well as those focused on general Internet search. In the last year, Yahoo acquired WhereOnEarth, a UK based company that created a unique digital gazetteer capable of aiding search engines to disambiguate geographical terms. The company’s products are now being integrated with Yahoo’s search engines in attempt both to sharpen the relevancy of results to queries that include geographic tokens and to assist advertising buyers with “buying” and targeting of advertisements that could enhance their sales on a geographic basis (and increase Yahoo’s profitability in the process).

I have spent considerable time, recently, examining many online gazetteers and speaking to developers of these products. In a make versus buy project for a client, I spent considerable time comparing gazetteers and creating a work plan for creating one from scratch using both proprietary and public domain sources.

Finally, over the last year, I have been involved as an expert witness in a patent case involving the use of gazetteers and potential intellectual property issues with certain geographic naming conventions.

The three focus areas of the meeting are especially relevant to my research interests (as much as a consultant can actually have “research interests”). I am interested in georeferencing as a process, especially in respect to its use on online search (including local search). Similarly, I am interested in issues surrounding geographic interoperability, as well as components of gazetteer services in respect to search.

I am intrigued by the potential opportunity to create a spatial version of UDDI to facilitate the creation of an international naming authority allowing “places” to list their details on the Internet. Not quite a WIKI perhaps, but something more effective than what we have today.

For these and many reasons, I would be interested in attending the Workshop in Gazetteers.

Mike Dobson