

# TIME FOR GEOSCIENTISTS TO REACH OUT

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**ABSTRACT:** We live in a time of unprecedented change, and the biggest and most disruptive change to affect us in the last 20 years are digital systems, and especially the Internet. The Internet has raised society's expectations, it has empowered citizens to be assertive about their needs, and to deliver services themselves if organisations do not make them available. But what has this got to do with geology?

No-one is questioning the fact that geological knowledge is critical to local and global economic and social wellbeing. Nor does this paper underestimate the progress of geologists in striving to move from 2 dimensional analogue practices to 3 and 4 dimensional digital systems. We have, to date, and not unreasonably, invested most of our time developing digital systems which are for geoscientists, either within our own organisations, or client organisations that employ geoscientists. But, with one or two notable exceptions, this means the work we are doing does not reach the very much larger audience it deserves to reach. A 3 or 4 dimensional model, however, comprehensive and precise, is of little value if it cannot be understood. And the hard fact is that very few people understand them – in communication terms they remain as arcane as a geological map.

So there is our challenge, and for geological surveys whose mission is to provide geological knowledge for our citizens, perhaps our responsibility. We need to move our focus from cryptic systems, to deploying services which disseminate intelligible knowledge to society. That is an exciting challenge. It is one which requires us to engage with users much more empathetically; almost all of us forget just how expert, and thus distant from the man in the street, we are. Reaching out will need us to think laterally about the way we use GIS, modelling, immersive, virtual and mobile technologies and how we can embrace the opportunities of social networking. Can we find a way to resolve the conflict between the virtue of the immediacy of the Internet and the need to assure scientific quality; isn't it true that accessibility is much more important than quality? Have we realised yet that the more data we present the less people understand? How can we capture and retain attention, and excite the wider community, and do that in an affordable way? And should we try to do that alone; it's time to genuinely engage with those outside geoscience - in other sciences, in economics, in social science and with the public. After all it is society who we are there to serve.

This presentation will take a candid look at the challenges faced by geologists in Europe, and especially in the UK; the way they have addressed those challenges and the successes they have achieved.

**KEYWORDS:** GIS, DIGITAL SYSTEMS, DIMENSIONAL MODELS.