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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Galdos CEO Ron Lake: Mapping the Future of the Browser



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[TechNewsWorld](#)
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Ron Lake, the original creator of Geography Markup Language, was one of the organizers of GeoWeb 2007. He is among those innovators working to produce the browser of the future: a map display that will let people zoom around a map to find the information they need instead of entering text to search.

The face of the Internet is rapidly changing. For instance, Web maps are no longer about finding your house online. A few years ago, map-making power remained in the hands of specialists. Today, map-making power is within everyone's grasp.

In the past two years, Web giants like [Google](#) (Nasdaq: GOOG) , [Microsoft](#) (Nasdaq: MSFT)  and [Yahoo](#) (Nasdaq: YHOO)  have created tools that let anyone with access to the Internet layer their own geographic landmarks, routes and information on top of Web maps and satellite images. However, this technology is already on the verge of going the way of the floppy disk.

For a week in mid-July, present-day mapping firms like Google, [Autodesk](#) (Nasdaq: ADSK) , Microsoft and [Esri](#) traded ideas with innovators from the Web-mapping industry in Vancouver, British Columbia, at GeoWeb 2007.

Ron Lake, the original creator of Geography Markup Language (GML), was one of the organizers of GeoWeb 2007. He is among those innovators working to produce the browser of the future: a map display that will let people zoom around a map to find the information they need instead of entering text to search.

TechNewsWorld asked Lake about the role of GeoWeb 2007 and his vision of the future of mapping for better consumer and government interactions on the Internet. Lake is CEO and chairman of [Galdos Systems](#).

TechNewsWorld: What was the purpose of the GeoWeb conference?

Ron Lake: The GeoWeb concept focuses on the integration of geography in the real world and its real-time graphical display through the Internet. GeoWeb 2007's principal theme, "From Mashups to Infrastructure," reflects the breadth, the evolution and the growing maturity of the GeoWeb. This theme acknowledges the highly visible consumer applications that helped spawn the GeoWeb while emphasizing that the GeoWeb is increasingly playing a meaningful role in mainstream, mission-critical applications. As such, the GeoWeb is now a key component in critical decision-making across a broad spectrum of market segments and application domains.

TechNewsWorld: What is driving this new technology?

Lake: Some parts of it are now possible. Governments have worried about not having this ability to deal with this concept for some time. Take, for instance, the logistical problems government agencies faced in handling the Katrina hurricane onslaught. That event presented a real need for information on the physical layout of affected areas. Huge volumes of geographical data had to be accessed. Forging the GeoWeb technology has not been easy to do.

TechNewsWorld: Is that the only pressing need for GeoWeb -- providing tools for government agencies?

Lake: Not at all. The technology is now moving beyond government use due to the growth of the Internet. Consumers have a great appetite for this technology as well. Actually, the roles of data creator and consumers of the data are blurring.

TechNewsWorld: What exactly is GML?

Lake: Geography Markup Language is marking codes to create GML-based language for navigating map displays on a computer screen. GML describes real-world issues such as a road, its properties and location, etc. The visualization part is a separate function -- like marking a word document to display in XML. The actual rendering is done by other engines.

TechNewsWorld: What are some of the practical uses for GML?

Lake: One example is in the aviation industry. GML will help pilots see where the runways are, where the various fly zones are, etc. Consumers will benefit, for example, by having better navigation devices in their vehicles. Drivers will be able to get pinpoint local searching rather than more global results.

TechNewsWorld: How will GeoWeb technology impact Web browsers?

Lake: Current Web browsers use search engines that act on an index of information built by bots or crawlers that scour the Internet to build a list of information on a given topic. Users then click on an item in the search list to go to that selected Web site. One direction in this new era of GeoWeb will have search engines that will build an index about locations and then let the robots  know where to place the information in relation to surrounding places and things.

TechNewsWorld: Will this type of technology eliminate existing search engines?

Lake: The new technology will become a blending of the current Web, comprised of documents, and extend the information to include spatial and geographic data into one all-inclusive display.

TechNewsWorld: In other words, Web searches will look more like a part of something like Google Earth mapping?

Lake: Much better than that. Most people assume that when they see a mapping display on the Web or an image produced by Google Earth, they are looking at an actual live photo. Not so at all. Much of those mapping details are based on information that is old. Instead, the Web browsers of the future will be based on information that is updated more, as in a real-time display. It will enhance the data-sharing. By comparison, the track record today is not that good. On average, the response time to change a map is 12 to 18 months. In other words, future Web browsers will have the ability to browse the real world through a virtual world in real time.

TechNewsWorld: What time frame do you envision for this to develop?

Lake: Well, it will take a while for this to happen. I've been wrong with my guestimates in the past. But I think we will start to see a lot of this new technology in mainstream use in three or four years. It will probably be an 80-20 percent thing, where 80 percent of it will happen initially, and the last 20 percent will be more difficult to implement.

TechNewsWorld: You mentioned earlier that some aspects of this GML concept were already in use. Can you give a few examples?

Lake: Japan now uses taxi cabs with special equipment that tells drivers their location -- like current GPS  systems -- but also sends to a central traffic command center the speed of the taxi, so monitors can track the degree of traffic congestion and implement better control measures. This won't work in every case, but it certainly will work in large cities.

Another example is the kind of preliminary mapping being done with the hundreds of surveillance cameras deployed in London and other European cities. 

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