

NZ hosts world leader in GIS

He may be listed as a Forbes billionaire but Jack Dangermond remains a man of the land, driven by an insatiable curiosity about all things geographical. Which explains why he is now the president of Esri, one of the world's largest corporations selling geographic information systems (GIS) technology.

Dangermond was the keynote speaker at a GIS conference in Auckland recently. Eagle Technology hosted the Esri Asia Pacific User Conference (APUC) for Esri in collaboration with the New Zealand Esri Users Group. Eagle Technology is the official New Zealand distributor for Esri, marketing, installing, managing and servicing Esri's ArcGIS systems in this country.

Dangermond's presence as a pivotal figure in the worldwide application and growth of GIS technology gave the conference considerable heft.

Beyond all that, Dangermond is also respected as an inspirational leader in environmental concerns, and a philanthropist of note.

He has steered Esri to become a pre-eminent company engaged in the effective marriage of GIS technologies with business intelligence. Says Dangermond: "Spatial information and knowledge lie at the heart of knowing your market, or your community, for business people, and local and national governments."

Born into a family of nurserymen in the red dirt country of Redlands, California, Dangermond started out studying landscape architecture. It was only when he engaged in post graduate study at Harvard University, that, as far as "understanding spatial patterns, relationships, and processes", he says, "the lights went on". He recalls that, at that time, the integration of geographic knowledge with the workings of businesses and local governments worldwide was "still very crude".

So his philosophy in establishing Esri was "to bring rational thinking to the environmental movement", which in the 1960s he says was beset by an overly "political approach". And he's probably right: in advancing any environmental cause, there is nothing more valuable than good, hard, irrefutable data – something that GIS systems can provide, and in as many layers as you need to support your case.

Interestingly, as Dangermond points out, these layers are "becoming more and more real time".

"GIS is moving to become much more dynamic," he reiterates, pointing out that until very recently, geographical data was usually gained from observations made in the past. Geospatial information achieved in real time can provide advantages to marketers, retailers, police, emergency services, civil defence and local government alike.



Jack Dangermond.

Dangermond says, for him, GIS is fundamentally interesting in four ways:

1. As a manifestation of a powerful visual language. "Maps tell stories."
2. GIS drives efficiency. His 10,000 cities as clients of Esri systems point to that.
3. "It helps people make better decisions, once they understand spatial patterns and relationships." (He cited the example of shopping centre planners who discovered how a railway line running through a city created a psychic barrier for older people, one they weren't comfortable crossing, even in their cars.)
4. The way in which GIS knowledge provides "understanding which precedes effective action".

The effectiveness of integrating GIS knowledge into city systems was vividly demonstrated after the Christchurch earthquake, when Eagle Technology helped enable the response teams with mapping technology just 24 hours after the event. This helped with the assembly of many layers of information – from directing emergency services along roads known to still be open, to monitoring exactly where the gas leaks and portals were.

A recovery team using GIS technology remains in operation and functioning to this day as part of the Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team (SCIRT), a team whose work Dangermond describes as "heroic".

Auckland Council has just invested in an integrated Esri GIS system, which will be accessible by a wide range of employees across all its departments as well as by members of the public. M

GENDER LIMITS

A lack of mentoring and other forms of guidance compounds the dramatic gender divide that opens up by the time many business people hit their 30s and 40s.

New research released by Colmar Brunton at the recent Women on Boards Gender Diversity Summit in Auckland shows many women are still not receiving the guidance they need to bridge New Zealand's workplace gender divide.

Colmar Brunton CEO Jacqueline Ireland says the survey confirms a "marked difference" between the numbers of men and women in leadership roles. It shows that half of men under 30 had the support of a mentor or manager at work whereas only a third of females in the same age group had similar support.

A significant 39 percent of 18-29 year-old women surveyed agreed that they have always wanted to be in top management, Ireland says.



Jacqueline Ireland.

That fell away to 25 percent in the 30-39 year age bracket and dropped to a lowly 12 percent of 40-49 year-old women.

A total of 59 percent of women with young families said they would not accept a role or promotion that meant time away from family. Only 34 percent of men with young families agreed with that statement.

"Women generally outperform men at all levels of education and are coming into the workforce brimming with ambition and ability," Ireland says. "Surely it is in companies' interests to harness this and invest in it."

Colmar Brunton's research estimates just 32 percent of senior management or executive positions are occupied by women compared to 42 percent of middle management and 45 percent of total company positions.

A by-product of these numbers is the continuing perception that women have to work harder than men to make it in the boardroom or at the top table.

A whopping 81 percent of female senior executives and 72 percent of women overall agreed that women need to work harder than men to prove themselves, while 34 percent of male workers agreed.

The 'Gender Diversity in the NZ workplace' survey is based on insights from 800 respondents. M



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