

The ubiquitous SatNav was one of the top Christmas gifts in 2006. But logistics expert Kirsten Tisdale says that there's far more to mapping information than simply getting from A to B...

Location, location, location

Do you know where your members are? Of course you do! Correct address information is crucial to all membership organisations – how else can you communicate with your members... But what would you say if I told you that you are already sitting on a powerful tool that can help you improve services to your members in unexpected ways?

Many organisations use MapPoint, which is part of the Microsoft family of analysis tools that accepts data direct from Excel and .csv formats. MapPoint has been revised recently, and released as 'MapPoint 2006 Europe'. The revisions were necessary, partly because of a huge increase in construction over recent years, but also to take account of postcode reorganisations – which Royal Mail says is necessary because of 'postcode exhaustion'.

If you're already a user of MapPoint, the new data alone is a good reason for upgrading your copy. (The data refresh also includes an updated road network so that, for instance, the M6 toll road is now included.) But now would also be a good time for those that haven't come across MapPoint before to try it out, and I'd like to explain why.

While many of the new GPS-related features of MapPoint will be of little direct interest to membership organisations, the core features of MapPoint continue to be valuable, because the tool enables users to visualise, analyse and communicate data. These core features include, among others, pinpointing data on maps and the ability to investigate 'drive-time zones'.

Pinpointing data on maps

MapPoint gives you a real feel for your members. For example, a simple exercise such as importing part or all of your membership database into the system and representing it as spots on a map (with each spot representing the location of a member), will instantly give you a feeling for the geography of your membership, an impression of where the 'hot spots' are and how they relate to both the road network and your own organisation's regional boundaries. These hot spots may be different for the various interest groups within your organisation.

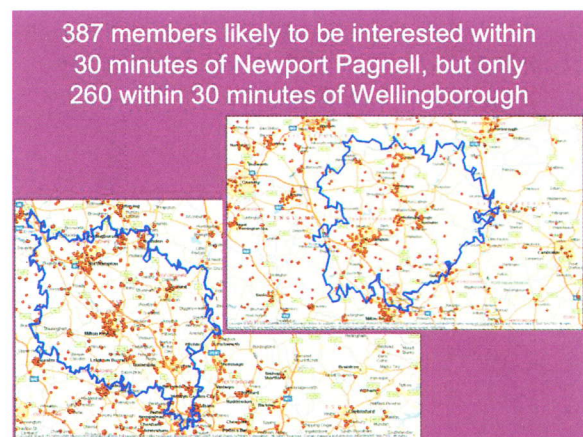
Kirsten Tisdale has been an active member of CILT (UK) for over twenty years. She established Aricia Limited in 2001, building on her career with M&S, TNT and Excel. A mathematics graduate, Kirsten is a trained user of Geographical Information Systems (GIS).

Even before you get as far as seeing your data on a map, just starting the import process will begin to give you a feel for the quality of the data – what proportion of your membership is MapPoint able to position on the map? (You need to bear in mind that, although the latest version includes new postcodes, life does continue to move on, and however accurate your data, there will always be members who live or work in new buildings where the postcode isn't yet recognised.)

Drive time zones

This is a really useful tool for identifying potential meeting points and the members that are likely to live or work within striking distance.

Think about this. Using MapPoint's 'drive-time zones' tool, you can enter a potential meeting point, tell the system what speed people are likely to travel (given the time of day and location of the meeting), and then state what you consider to be an optimum 'drive time' for the people you would like to invite to the meeting. MapPoint does the rest – identifying the number of members that are within that drive time. You can even use it to compare one potential meeting point with another.



The best bit is that, having decided on your meeting point, you can then export a list of members that are likely to attend and use that to generate a mailshot or email listing.

MemCom

I hope I've whetted your appetite sufficiently that you come along to MemCom in central London on 1 March, where I'll be presenting a case study that explains how I used mapping and other analysis techniques that I use within my 'day job' as a logistics consultancy to analyse the database of my professional body – the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT UK) – and how I trained existing CILT (UK) staff, so that they can interrogate the database whenever they wish.