

# Magellan Bridges Gap Between User Friendliness and Compactness Important

In the previous issue of Geoinformatics we published an article on the take-over of Thales Navigation by Shah Capital Partners (SCP). The official launch of the new name Magellan took place at INTERGEO in October. GIS-Magazine and Geoinformatics held interviews with Bas Verbeek, Sales manager Land Survey & GIS Benelux, and VP & General Manager Magellan Professional François Erçeau. This article is a compilation of what these gentlemen said.

By Remco Takken and Sonja de Bruijn



*It was hard to miss out the new company name Magellan at INTERGEO.*

## Core Business

In July the Thales Group said goodbye to the navigation division, a decision which was made after a thorough revision of the Thales portfolio. This made evident that the Defence, Aerospace and Security departments were core business. Verbeek: "Car navigation is really booming but this is not core to Thales' business. So they decided that the company could expand more rapidly under a more focused sharehold. That's when SCP came into view."

Lately there has been quite a lot of criticism regarding take-overs by investment companies, the main fear being that successful companies are simply stripped and sold again. According to Magellan however SCP is an investment company that is helping companies on a long-term basis and with a focus on technology corporations. Verbeek: "In fact the take-over is neither strange nor frightening. It provides us with the ability to grow with the financial means and the operational expertise of SCP." According to Erçeau the

product strategy will still be determined by Magellan, while the operational structure, logistics and implementation of the products can be enhanced with the expertise SCP brings. "The company will be even more dynamic and customers will notice this by more frequent product releases."

## Magellan Professional

Magellan was already a well-established brand of Thales Navigation for the consumer market. The American company with that

# n Consumer and Professional

name belonged to the first commercial GPS developers in the eighties, claiming to be the first in the market. From 1997, after a merge with Ashtech, the company called itself Magellan Corporation. Meanwhile a number of companies amalgamated under the name of Dassault Sercel NP, the last two letters standing for 'Navigation Positioning'. "The name Thales Navigation came about in 2001, when Thales Group acquired the American Magellan Corporation and merged it with DSNP and MLR in Europe. In fact, we have been making use of the name Magellan for years, but only as a result of the acquisition is it now also the company name. To distinguish between consumer and professional markets the professional products are now sold under the name Magellan Professional", says Verbeek.

## Consumer Focus

What distinguishes Magellan from the others is the long experience with consumer products. Verbeek: "These are typical consumer products like car navigation, hand-held GPS and tools for outdoor sports like geo caching. On the professional side there is RTK-GPS and MobileMapper CE: a PDA with integrated GPS. We are combining the technologies of the consumer and professional products to improve and make further developments. I think we are the only one in the market doing it this way."

The advantages of good consumer electronics are user friendliness and compactness. The professional user will demand more from company security. A device like that has to be both water resistant and shock proof. Users that are in the field or are dredging while the battery is running empty need to be sure they can start working again in very short time. "User friendliness is an important aspect with professional products as well. Besides this not only highly educated people are using these devices anymore. A GPS needs to be simple and clear."

"The complexity of the system needs to be hidden from the customer", is Erceau's view. "In practical use customers will experience a user interface that is easier to use. There is a large color-lit screen and Promark 3 for example involves only three screens to run a full survey job"

## Business Partnering and Openness

Although Magellan develops software in its consumer business, it does not develop software specifically for MobileMapper CE. Verbeek indicates what the core quality of Magellan is: "We are good at GPS, and the software for the markets MobileMapper CE serves may be done by people experienced in those vertical markets. We have partnered with several suppliers of custom made applications. Some examples are Alterra, ESRI and IT Works. Standard functionality is not always tailored to the user. TurboVeg or VMCE are quite specific applications. Alterra provides software applications in the field of ecology, like flora and fauna, IT Works has products for soil researchers."

The sales manager Land Survey & GIS Benelux continues: "We are fully aimed at GPS. This means we are not restricted to a limited choice of total stations. This is why we have an open view towards other parties developing software for seamless connections with any total stations available. An example of this is our Fast Survey software. ADW Software, the company behind Pythagoras CAD + GIS, has also a mobile application for pen computers in the field. With this device a user can control the Magellan GPS as well as any total station available in the market."

## Radio Reception LRK Network

Magellan is also aiming at another kind of openness: when working on centimetre level one is dependent on correction networks. Verbeek claims: "We are one of the few companies in this market connecting to everything: commercial networks on GSM and GPRS technology but also 'real' radio correction stations. The Z-Max can handle both radio and GSM/GPRS."

According to Verbeek RTK is a better system in spite of a few small limitations. The question is of course why GSM is so popular nowadays. Verbeek: "If you want to cover an entire country the obvious choice is GSM. The limited reach by radio is regarded as an important disadvantage. However Magellan is quite experienced in the maritime sector, our reach is forty kilometres and more by radio. In many cases this is wide enough. For certain uses GSM is expensive. In a technical perspective radio is better, since GSM networks have their

typical problems: delay and coverage."

Still the question is whether radio reception can be successful in future. Verbeek says to this: "We invested eight years in Long Range Kinematic (LRK) stations, especially in knowledge and technology. And it is a technology that has proven itself worldwide. We won't let this go – there's too much benefit for the customer."

## GLONASS - Galileo

Current GPS devices often make it possible to receive European Galileo as well as Russian GLONASS signals besides the American GPS signals. Verbeek confirms this trend: "Right now, this is a marketing game. Competitors have been quick to play at it, and we would come to it but only when the benefit to the customer does outweigh the cost.. GPS is good enough for now but we keep a close eye on the technology. Ashtech, one of the companies we are originating from, launched the first geodetic GPS-GLONASS RTK receiver in December 1997. Back then the Russian constellation was complete, it was of real use, but now it has deteriorated. At the moment ten satellites can be used, which results in two to three satellites for extra use. However GLONASS and Galileo are just virtual satellites right now."

It is a matter of time, but apart from this Magellan remains hesitant. Verbeek makes a comparison with the megapixels in digital photography: "It is said that more megapixels means better pictures, but naturally this is not the case. With a larger number of satellites in a disadvantageous position there will still be no better result. Besides the number of signals the quality remains important as well. Under trees the user will notice that all signals are evenly disturbed. We are ready with these technologies today, but there needs to be a further value before Magellan will bring these technologies to market."

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Surf to [www.magellanGPS.com](http://www.magellanGPS.com) for additional information on Magellan Navigation and products.