



WOMEN IN LOCATION [GEO-BI]

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NATASHA *What does location intelligence/geo mean to you?*

PREETHA It simply started out meaning very exciting technology—figuring out how to solve “mapping problems” with computers. This was some time ago, when I worked on software programs that created digital maps. Now this has transformed into information that we use without knowing that we are using it! Location intelligence is being used all around the world for everything from an invite to a kid’s birthday party to governments’ managing all their assets. It has gone from innovative, somewhat exotic (i.e. expensive) technology to being pervasive—a part of every day life. But I must admit, I am still impressed by the technology.

NATASHA *How did you get into location?*

PREETHA Like a lot of things in my life, it was accidental—a nice accident. Right out of college, the first job I landed was with Intergraph when they were just beginning to enter the CAD/CAM arena. It was all about what new applications could be created using computer graphics. One of the first contracts they got was with TVA, who needed to digitize their maps—putting paper maps on the computer to make them easier to store, find, and update. I was a programmer then, and they asked me to work in the mapping department. I didn’t choose it. That is why I say it was an accident—nothing that I had planned as part of some great career plan.

However, that was the beginning of a career that took me from software development to product marketing and management to marketing industry solutions to managing P&Ls for a global geospatial business. From the beginning, I always thought that maps and graphics were an ideal match; both are so visual. However, really what is even more striking is all the intelligence that lies behind the pretty picture.

NATASHA *How does location inspire?*

PREETHA There’s a part of our brain that is spatial. We all have some sort of map to help us to navigate through life, don’t we? Whether we know it or not, location information helps people make better decisions. There are examples all around us, whether one is a politician, a business person or a tourist. Location brings us down to earth; it makes us more grounded, more informed and more effective decision makers.

NATASHA *Is there a difference between how the enterprise and individual responds to location?*

PREETHA Yes, the difference is between what consumers use and what professionals need. For example, optimizing voting applications for use by governments is very different from how a consumer uses maps to get directions or find a restaurant. A national water company may seek to optimize operations through spatial workflows including integrated customer workflows that help them issue work permits. This is a professional use of location.

While an individual or consumer may touch some or all of these applications at some point, they are rarely aware of the complexities that drive those applications. It is the sophistication and complexity of implementing such location-based applications versus the simplicity of using applications that causes enterprise users and individuals to respond differently to location.

NATASHA *How does location-based thinking improve business, the world and society, the economy?*

PREETHA It is important to understand how governments and businesses traditionally did their work, usually using information that came to them in the form of tabular reports. But realize that almost everything we do has a



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location component or context: we fix customer complaints at locations, we go to vote at a specific location, emergency services are provided at a particular location, accidents or crimes occur at locations, and the list goes on and on. With the ability to integrate all the relevant information needed through a common location lens, we have transformed the efficiency and accuracy of decision-making.

Location-based systems and thinking help governments provide more efficient services, help consumers resolve problems sooner, help people live healthier lives with better environmental information, help citizens stay safer, and so on. Location is an endemic part of the solutions we are building; the deeper the location information can be integrated and fused with other information, the more effective the results. That's why you can find so many funded programs and projects around the world that are based on including a geospatial context into the mix. Its value has been proven many times over.

NATASHA *What is your role relative to location in your position?*

PREETHA I currently manage the North American business for Rolta, a global IT solutions company. Location is a core part of some of our practices, based primarily on Geo-BI (Geospatial Business Intelligence) and Geospatial Fusion. Our focus is less about foundational geospatial technology and more about providing business solutions that leverage geospatial and location assets owned, for example by utility companies or public works departments. We then work on providing solutions that converge the geospatial assets with other information to create new insights and impacts for the enterprise. Ultimately, these solutions are designed to help our customers achieve cost and operational efficiencies and provide better service to their customers.

NATASHA *What is the future of location?*

PREETHA As pervasive as location has become, it will disappear from the foreground and become a natural embedded part of almost everything we do and virtually every business process. We are going to see new business solutions that use location in innovative ways in order to solve real-world problems. The geospatial technology and services industry started out with mapping the world, then managing assets by mapping them, then responding to customer complaints with location. It has now moved into the realm of integrated, real-time updates to solve business problems or provide new consumer services. I foresee increased integration—for example, the combination of mobility, location and Big Data (say in the form of real-time updates) that will take applications to a whole new level. Now, just imagine if you were to take location out of that equation—wouldn't there be a huge gap in the results?

NATASHA *How does location benefit women in the world?*

PREETHA Women are under-represented in technology and therefore also within the location industry. I wish there were forums where we could encourage more women to get involved and engaged. It is really an exciting area to be in, and there are multiple entry points into the location profession—approaching from either the technical or the application side. Increasingly on the application end, there are more users of location information and intelligence, whether you are an urban planner, or a marketing professional or a policy maker. From my own experience, I can conclusively say that it has been an exciting journey—to see this field change and grow just as the technology has also evolved. Lucky for me, that journey is not over yet.