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What does your company do?

Oxford Retail Consultants (ORC) profile and forecast spend of consumers for many applications. These include asset holders (i.e. landlords of large format shops, retail/shopping centres), local authorities (wanting to know future demands on amenities, or trying to market sites for development), out of home media owners (wanting to profile passers-by of digital billboards). We cast drivetime boundaries but also use a proprietary gravity model for casting catchment boundaries. We also create and serve via an online GIS, location databases for retail and service sectors. We combine the location data with the profile data to allow customers to make strategic decisions.

What is your role?

Head of Operations: I have an input into much of the project work. I'm heavily involved with business development and project tendering. I manage a team of data collectors and project coordinators.

Describe a typical mapping or spatial analysis task conducted in your role?

Gravity modelling involves a great deal of calibration. Starts with fieldwork and research to ensure you have a clear view of what the current situation is. This is both on the supply (retail locations/sizes/ages/'quality') and demand (population stats: profiles/spend habits) and then forecasting horizon years incorporating new provision and changes to population (planning applications/govt/3rd party forecasters), value added datasets / online GIS. Having the stats presented in a usable interface, and having been attributed with other data sources (locations with sizes/owners/ages; roads with traffic volumes/speeds achieved; towns with spend) etc… Many of these involve using GIS either offline or online.

GEOGRAPHIC DATA SCIENCE LAB

What career path did you follow into your current job?

I've an undergrad in Remote Sensing & GIS from BathSpa Uni – from there straight into Getmapping as a technician, a major provider of aerial imagery, GPS ground control and more recently online GIS. Then to ORC who profile and forecast spend of consumers for many applications. Whilst at ORC, took a PGDip via distance learning in Software Engineering at Liverpool.

What advice would you give a student wishing to start a Geographic Data Science career in your industry?

I think it's tempting to want to go straight to a 'working with data role' rather than collecting data roles. I'd argue that having started in a more collecting-based position you are then much more suited to working with the data. Stats are often dubious! – if you've had experience generating databases (which is repetitive and maybe boring) your conclusions and output from using the data will be far better informed. In my experience, physical GIS applications are often more exciting (coastal, environmental etc) – human GIS (demographics) have more money sloshing around…

Where do you see the Geographic Data Science industry going in the next 10 years?

People don't realise they use GIS or how much they rely on it. All the mobile applications, news, advertising etc all heavily rely on it. The information we provide customers may not ultimately be too different but how they receive, how up-to-date, how accessible the data is will be driven by GIS advances.