

Using Enterprise Geocoding for a Competitive Edge

Five Good Reasons To Geocode Your Business Data

Research Perspective

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The Key Role of Enterprise and International Geocoding

The marketplace is a demanding taskmaster; it insists that a business stay agile and open to new ideas and directions in order to remain competitive. This has very much been the case with location as a customer and operational attribute. With striking rapidity, location has become the key to reaching new customers and servicing existing customers more effectively. However, to use location attributes to operate smarter, organizations first must ensure that their information is coded with location-specific data to enable business processes that utilize geographic location as a decision factor.

While it seems obvious that knowing where things and people are can shape how well a business operates, our benchmark research shows that this aspect of information is not always well-managed. Every organization and its departments can benefit from rigorously making location data a part of its decision-making processes, but those that operate internationally in particular will benefit by deploying locally effective procedures in every country in which they operate or that they ship to. In fact, our benchmark research into location intelligence found that increasing the accuracy of information is a top factor for investment, and also that integrating location data context is a top priority of importance for 73 percent of companies.

Having the right awareness of location can be a key investment, one that provides more than just savings from eliminating inaccuracies in mailing and deliveries; it also averts the cost of missed opportunities when communications never reach their intended destinations. Indeed, in today's markets a lack of location awareness can cause the company to lose time and even customers.

The process of assigning geocoordinates to a location's description is known as geocoding. On an enterprise level, geocoding operates across company divisions and national boundaries. Properly executed, enterprise geocoding provides valuable functions:

- It profiles the information provided to determine its quality and potential for geographic context.
- It performs validation to ensure the data is accurate and refers to real locations.
- It encodes input to align to the geographic reference data.
- It determines the data's geographical accuracy level and confidence level of assigning data.
- It examines and resolves exceptions by identifying options for resolution.
- It uses the geocoded data to enrich company information with other relevant information.

This last step is crucial: To gain a competitive advantage, users should upgrade the business data that has been geocoded with related information, which can range from demographic details to business validation and scoring data from country-

specific sources. It is a process that, done properly and regularly, can dramatically improve an organization's effectiveness, competitiveness and performance.

The most obvious value of geocoding for international operations lies in delivering communications at the lowest cost in the shortest time. This is important not just for marketing and sales activities but also for customer service operations that require follow-up. Beyond the front office, the company requires accurate location data to ensure efficient billing and accounting operations. Batch geocoding delivers value as well in enhancing analytics, which are the business tools used to optimize operations and keep them aligned to the company's objectives. The absence of continual geocoding thus can hamper the business by obstructing consideration of the important dimension of geography.

Efficient geocoding is best done in-house rather than by sending your data to a third-party provider. The organization's own people need to manage geocoding as part of the ongoing direction of its business processes. Geocoding properly is a technology-mediated undertaking, and as such it requires a team with knowledge of both the technology and the company's information-related processes and systems. A centralized approach can enable efficient management while providing access to the information across departments.

Geocoding is not simply a nice addition to an organization's array of data; it can streamline a business's processes, improve customer service and add value to its results. Consider each of the following as you look into what geocoding can do for yours.

Five Business Reasons for Enterprise and International Geocoding

1: Establish and maintain a competitive advantage.

In competitive market situations, it's smart to ensure that accurate, high-quality information is being used in all your business operations. Geocoding properly for domestic and international operations can enable effective business decisions that can increase profitability and decrease costs. It also can help an organization assess where to focus its efforts to gain new customers or seize new opportunities. It can be strategically important to have enterprise and international geocoding to ensure the efficient analysis of customers and opportunities through integration with customer and related location data .

2: Improve business efficiency through accurate location proximity.

Knowing that you have accurate location information about customers and prospects is critical for making decisions in areas ranging from marketing and sales to specific promotions and services that should be provided. Having accurate address information adds confidence to proximity analyses. Knowing the exact locations of individuals and assets can help in targeting new opportunities or eliminating inappropriate existing ones. Organizations should consider the

addresses of these critical items as among their most important data assets. Enterprises that embrace geocoding both domestically and internationally can derive business value from the location accuracy it provides.

#3: Reduce operational risk. Reducing operational risk across departments requires accurate geographic information on the company's stakeholders, from customers to suppliers. It is critical to almost every business process, and minimizing risk requires geocoding that can validate both address and actual location. But since every department can input or modify location data, systems managers must ensure that when sharing across the organization, all data is properly validated and geocoded. This requires an enterprise approach to location information.

#4: Improve the customer experience. Customers have become more demanding and, in business terms, less easily satisfied because they have more options than ever before. One of the keys to customer satisfaction is providing precise information in a responsive manner regardless of the contact channel the customer has chosen. Achieving this requires the agent to have complete, quickly accessible information on, for example, the location of and distance to a retail outlet, relevant health facility or service center. And, of course, location data is key when needing to respond to an urgent situation. To be able to deliver this level of information requires the prior geocoding of known locations as well as location awareness in operational systems and enterprise applications. This in turn requires enterprise-class geocoding that can be applied to interactions with customers anywhere in the world.

#5: Increase profitability and cost-effectiveness. Being successful requires being timely and cost-effective in your operations. Economic pressures have led to significant automation of business processes and reduction of staff to operate them; now these changes are forcing organizations to consider new methods to gain even more efficiency. One such method is to acquire geographic and location information and maintain it at peak accuracy so that any operational process requiring a location component can be carried out correctly, on time and to the satisfaction of the recipient or participant. For example, existing business processes can be improved through the geocoding of business data to deliver an accurate address or a specific location by latitude and longitude. In addition, enriching this location information with other critical data from within the organization, the Internet or third-party data suppliers can help organizations improve their performance significantly. To do this requires an enterprise approach to geocoding, both domestically and internationally.

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