

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

For the investment in mapping software to be worthwhile, it should deliver performance improvements and cost benefits that far outweigh the initial investment. Mapping software is dangerous in this context because the highly visual nature of the software can easily sway a quick purchase decision... then the problems start.

Buying the software is only the tip of the iceberg, significant investment has to be made in establishing objectives, securing the right data and putting aside the time, for the investment to truly pay off.

Geoplan has been in this field for over 20 years and during that time we have seen many new entrants to the market, many failed systems and disappointed customers. In this time, we have learnt that all the software's deliver pretty much the same functionality, with systems targeted at either single or multi-user environments. However the one thing that isn't the same is the quality of business understanding and pre and post sales service provided. It is in the early stages of assessment and planning that the system will either succeed or fail.

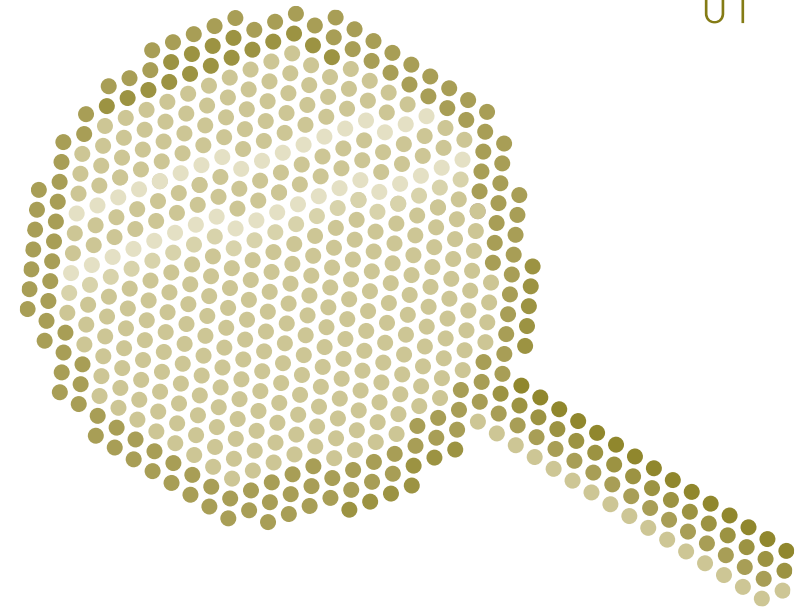
Acknowledging the above, business and user needs are split into two broad areas:

LARGE COMPANIES/MULTI USERS NEED:

- Integrate into existing IT systems.
- Connectivity to Enterprise wide databases.
- Ease of update and administration.
- Broad user access and control capabilities.
- Strong technical and user support.
- Clear upgrade and development path.
- Development capabilities.

SMALL COMPANIES/SINGLE USERS NEED:

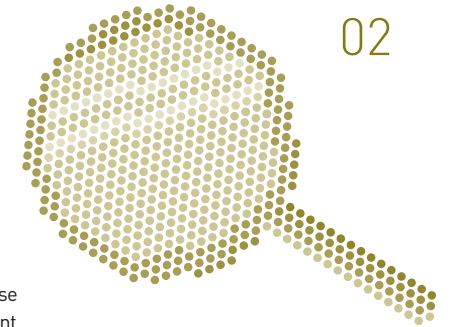
- Simple to install systems.
- Ease of use.
- Data import and export functions.
- Available and clear support.
- Upgrade path as knowledge or needs increase.



FOR MORE INFORMATION... Our expert team are on hand to talk you through your precise requirements. This way, you can be sure that you will get the right product for your business needs, call

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EASE OF USE AND UPGRADE PATH

Regardless of the functionality available, if you can't easily use the system then it is of no use. Significant time and money is lost in accessing the user guide, help files or calling technical support.

The key here is how well the interface accommodates typical users:

- Is the interface intuitive, can you understand what is required?
- Are messages clear?
- Are wizards available for more complex tasks?
- Can you find the right 'button' to perform a task?
- Does the user guide and help provide the information you need?
- Is the support line readily accessible and informative?

In addition, as the user progresses or the business need becomes more complex, it is important to source a supplier that provides upgrades to functionality and makes it easy to trade up.

DATA CONTENT, AVAILABILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

Mapping systems rely on a range or core datasets to allow them to function. Namely a map base, postal geography and optional demographic or business data. Data can be an expensive element and it is important to understand what comes with the system as standard. It should also be borne in mind that the data in such systems can become out of date, this is therefore a cost to be considered and understood.

Additional data is available from a variety of sources specific to industry sectors and types of application.

Typical data available is:

- Map bases at differing scales.
- Boundary sets that represent, postcodes, media, administration and industry types.
- Point datasets that allow the user to map the location of customers, prospects, branches competitors etc.
- Census demographics.
- Lifestyle and business data sets.
- Traffic flow data.

Data can be held either within the system itself or accessed from external databases. The data will be provided in a variety of formats dependant upon the system selected. Many systems allow the creation and retention of import routines that aid the process of bringing data into a system. This approach can be applied to data of a similar format that is refreshed over time, e.g. monthly performance data.

Connectivity to existing business information and third party data is of primary importance if a business is to get the most from the system. Only when revenue, cost, resource and KPI information is attached can the system truly effect business performance decisions.

DATA VISUALISATION, MAPS AND REPORTS

The ease and quality of Map and data report output can vary considerably. The ability to create useful maps that can be included easily in other documents and presentations is a key factor in the selection process.

The maps and reports produced should be available as templates for easy recreation or update with new data. They should be easily transferable to other packages such as Excel, Word or PowerPoint and should be able to generate image files such as PDF and Jpeg, or database cuts for reports and mailings.

All features that aid the rapid communication and distribution of results to a wider audience. Surprisingly, some desktop GIS packages that print great maps have a limited capacity to generate reports.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS

Whilst acknowledging the basic ability to plot points or customers on a map. One of the greatest strengths of these packages is the ability to aggregate and cut data linked to specific geographic coverage areas.

The most important mapping and analysis operations include catchment and territory analysis, proximity analysis, geocoding and Drivetime analysis.

In addition to these spatial operations, business applications require that databases are 'query enabled', such that the user can, for example 'find all Postcodes with target customers aged 50 with an average income of £45,000 that are within 15 minutes Drivetime of a proposed store location'.

CUSTOMISATION

Once the basic workflows are understood, the ability to customise your chosen system is of significant benefit.

Customisation will allow the creation of wizards to simplify tasks or to automate repetitive processes. The benefits are increased productivity, ease of skills transfer to other users and a re-direction of time towards using the results, not producing them.

The availability of a customisation language, supported by the ability to configure templates and routines are important features.

CONTRACTS, MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE COSTS

Mapping systems and data vary considerably in terms of cost and contract structure. Ranging from less than one hundred pounds to tens of thousands of pounds. Generally speaking there are several things to consider.

- Initial system and data cost.
- Implementation and training costs.
- Data availability and update costs – sometimes annual.
- Software maintenance and support costs.
- Support service level.
- Contract duration and flexibility – sometimes up to 3 years.
- Software upgrade path.