Astun News

What's in a name?

Welcome to Astun News. So much has changed in the last 18 months that we felt a name change was in order! We have published iShare News since 2007 but feel that iShare is now only part of what we do, what with Training, Base Mapping services, bespoke Application Development and Cloud based Hosting.

Although it might not feel like summer, it's here and we have just surfaced from out busiest ever first quarter, our eighth birthday and the MapAction Hackathon, more of which later.

williamallbrook@astuntechnology.com

ADS Update

We already have 15 customers using Astun Data Services mostly for their publicly facing websites but others are also using it for their Intranet GIS. ADS is something we have kept quite quiet about until now. It all started with Exactrak (see iShare News Summer 2012) who required a 'Cloud' based hosting solution. This included the development of a special loader to enable the full range of PSMA and OpenData to be loaded into a PostGIS database. Well why are we talking about it now? Well it's because version 2 has just been completed after several months of development.

Version 2 provides National base mapping, TMS and WMS, as follows:

* OS Open (VectorMap District, Meridian2 and Strategi)
* OS Premium (OS Open + MasterMap and VectorMap Local)
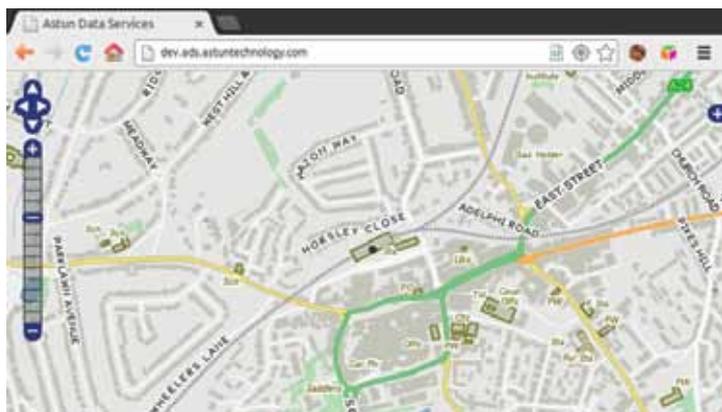* OS Premium Greyscale
* OSM-GB (OpenStreetMap)

As well as improvements to the cartography there's the facility to watermark OS Premium layers support for 'https' and much improved performance with many of the urban areas pre-seeded to eliminate initial cacheing. We are also hosting customer sourced aerial photography when required.

ADS also includes feeds from other OpenData services too including Edubase, NHS Choices, Local Government Boundaries, Electoral Boundaries (BoundaryLine) enhanced with data from OpenlyLocal and UK Neighbourhood Crime incident data.

Under the hood, we are using OSGeo technologies. All the GML map source data has been loaded using our own 'Loader' software into a PostGreSQL/PostGIS database. MapServer does the map rendering and MapProxy deals with the tilecache. The whole caboodle is hosted by Amazon web services, which are scalable and load balanced to deliver fast performance regardless of the number of users accessing the service.

If you want to know more or arrange a trial please contact: sales@astuntechnology.com

Astun Data Services - OS Premium

G-Cloud

Astun Technology solutions are now available from the CloudStore, part of the Government's G-Cloud supplier framework. This could not be more timely as the Cabinet Office has just announced its 'Cloud First' mandate. This ensures that in future, public sector organisations must consider and fully evaluate potential Cloud solutions first when procuring new or existing services, before considering any other options.

Astun has been awarded a place on the framework for two offerings in the CloudStore. The first is 'Astun Data Services' (see ADS Update)

Government Procurement Service *supplier*

whilst the second offering is 'Get INSPIREd', an INSPIRE compliant service for Metadata Discovery Services, View and Download Services.

By the way the December deadline for INSPIRE is looming; our Get INSPIREd solution is available on the ground (on your premises) or in the Cloud.

Find out more: www.astuntechnology.com/getinspired

Matt Walker providing an update on ADS at the Astun User Group meeting in Newport

Astun User Group

In June Newport City Council kindly hosted the third User Group meeting. There was good representation from Welsh Councils and others from across the border in England. Our hosts gave an excellent presentation of their latest update to iShare which includes the provision of Job Centre information through My House, and reduced dependency on the call centre courtesy of Logger. iShare GIS is also available to over 2000 officers across the authority. My Newport is scoring 80% of the hotspot analysis on the home page too.

Mike Saunt demoed the latest version of iShare GIS, Matt Walker provided an update on Astun Data Services and Steven Feldman talked about 'Get INSPIREd,' Astun's INSPIRE solution, both on site and in the Cloud. In the afternoon session Mike Saunt talked about the product roadmap, a brilliant opportunity for users to air their views and flag up requirements and priorities for new development.

The group, chaired by Richard Lewis at Newport City Council, aims to hold its meetings at other locations to suit the wide geographical distribution of Astun customers who are all welcome to attend. There is normally a dinner the night before making it even more worthwhile.

The next meeting is likely to be held in October to coincide with the GeoPlace Everything Happens Somewhere conference. More details soon.

Interested? Please contact: richard.lewis@newport.gov.uk or mikesmith@astuntechnology.com

MapAction Hackathon

In April Astun Technology hosted a 'hackathon' at its Epsom offices on behalf of the AGI and MapAction. MapAction is a charity that sends teams to natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and hurricanes, and works in complex humanitarian emergencies such as the refugee crisis unfolding in Syria today. Volunteers tend to have expertise in GIS, GPS and other geospatial technologies. Teams trained in disaster response assist NGOs, the UN and other agencies in their planning and decision making by assemblying data from disparate sources and providing a vital mapping resource.

For the hackathon, the MapAction team had compiled a list of problems and ideas drawn from their experience in the field. Three of the highlights include developing a tool to help display population movement on a map. In a situation like the current Syrian conflict it is important be able to visualise the complex migration of the affected population. Think maps with multiple large sweeping arrows! The second, affectionately called the 'Dirty Data Dashboard' was a training objective. This sought to create a tool that could take some good quality data, such as might be available in the UK and jumble it up so that it would be more like the data that the field teams might encounter in the real world. The third objective focused on metadata, vital when rapidly assembling disparate datasets for map use.

"It was hugely gratifying to have so many people come to use their talents and enthusiasm to help us with tasks that sometimes get hidden in the background of our work," said Andy Smith (Technical Project Leader) from MapAction. "We are very grateful to everyone who turned up and contributed and to Astun Technology and AGI for making the day possible."
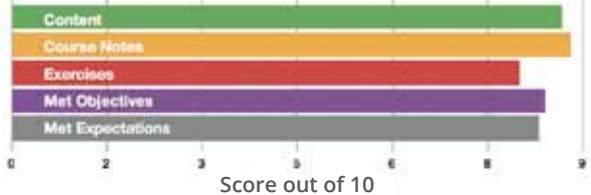
Training Plaudits

In 2012 we started to run PostgreSQL/PostGIS training courses, they have been very popular and provide a very cost effective way to making the most of your investment in Open Source. In 2013 we started to run courses focused on Quantum GIS (QGIS) too. The courses have been run at our Epsom offices but also at other locations in England, Wales and Scotland. If there's enough demand and an appropriate venue we'll run a course.
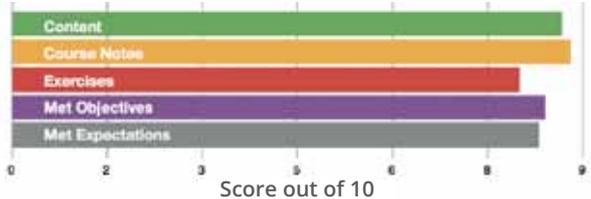
Don't forget you get 12 CPD points for the whole three day PostgresSQL/PostGIS course and 8 points for the two day course.

www.astuntechnology.com/ training

QGIS feedback

Score out of 10

Post GIS feedback

Score out of 10

Life's too short...
"With sincere apologies to the Two Ronnies"

Open Source Support

Did you know we offer enterprise-grade Open Source support? Many organisations are adopting Open Source but need enterprise-grade support to underpin their IT strategies and that is where our support packages can help. We're supporting clients in Central Government and Local Government (London Boroughs, Districts and Counties), Police Force, National Park and Housing Association sectors to name but a few.

We offer three 'off the shelf' support packages depending upon the extent of cover that you need. For those who may have larger mission critical systems we can offer a customised package with varying response times. There has been quite a lot of interest in our PostgreSQL/PostGIS and QGIS training courses so we have now started to offer specific Open Source support. This also addresses the fact that many organisations are adopting Open Source but do not necessarily have the expertise to maintain it.

The basic package provides email support by our specialists with no onsite services. The two higher level packages offer telephone support, increased level of cover, faster response times and on site consultancy to be used however you choose. In situations where say a PostGIS installation is mission critical one of the higher level packages would be appropriate.

	Small	Medium	Large
Specialist support service			
By email	✓	✓	✓
By phone	✗	✓	✓
1st response time	Next working day	4-8 hours	2-4 hours
Astun Open Community Forum	✓	✓	✓
Support incident units[1]	16	40	100
Consultancy or mentoring days	0	2	5
Discount on additional Developer Days Rates	0%	5%	10%

[1] A support incident unit is up to 30 minutes

As you can see from the table above the packages extend beyond basic support to mentoring/consultancy and specific development if required.

Anyone interested should contact: sales@astuntechnology.com