

Editor's Footnote: Do We Need a Journal?

By Landon Blake

When I was first seeking contributions for this annual report from OSGeo Chapters and Software Projects I received an thought-provoking e-mail from Cameron Shorter about the return on investment realized by the busy programmers who would need to stop coding to help write the annual report item for their software project. At its essence, I think Cameron's e-mail was asking if the effort was worth it.

Cameron's e-mail was excellent. I wanted to conclude Volume 11 of the OSGeo Journal with a short editor's footnote that responded to Cameron's intelligent questions, and spoke to some of the broader questions I think his e-mail raised.

Before we answer the larger question that deals with the importance of having a journal for our organization, let me specifically address questions about our annual report.

Who is the target audience for the annual report?

I segregate our target audience into two (2) groups. In the first group are OSGeo members or people actively involved in the open source geospatial software development community. For this group, the annual report provides an opportunity to evaluate the efforts of their peers. I hope the annual report provides these readers with an opportunity to be inspired by what others are doing.

The second group is people that aren't actively involved in OSGeo or open source geospatial software, but are starting to explore those areas. They might be regular users of proprietary geospatial software, and they've seen one or two open source tools that have sparked their interest.

What will attract readers to the annual report?

The main thing I can do as the editor of (and you can do as a contributor to) the annual report, is ensure we have content that is enjoyable to read. The quality of the annual report items and

the level of participation by OSGeo chapters, sponsors, and software projects are important factors.

I'm taking one (1) important step towards improving the quality of our annual report items currently. I'm in the midst of writing two (2) guides that will help authors contribute better annual reports. The first guide will be for OSGeo local chapters, while the second guide will be for OSGeo software projects.

The level of participation by chapters and software projects can be increased mainly through your own efforts. I'll be working on annual report item templates that will make this a bit easier, and the guides should help to. The journal already takes care of annual report item review, copyediting, and formatting for contributors.

I'm also striving to include at least a couple of articles not directly related to the annual report in each annual report. In this issue we had an open source geospatial software case study, an interview with a super user, a topical article about sharing GIS data models, and an article about a new software toolkit written in Ruby. These additional articles should spice up the annual report and make it more appealing.

How is the OSGeo Journal being marketed?

As the editor, my marketing efforts will focus on the following tasks:

1) Maintenance of the [OSGeo Journal Blog](#).

2) Conversion of the journal content into a variety of formats, including HTML, EPUB, PDF and content for publication in [Google Currents](#).

The rest of the marketing, at least for the time being, is up to you. If you have specific ideas about how to increase the number of people reading the journal, please discuss it with our volunteer team.

Do we need a journal?

I want to conclude this editor's footnote by answering this important question. It is a question I've given a lot of careful thought to. It takes a great deal of effort to write, copyedit, format, and publish the Journal. Many hours are contributed by the Journal team members.

Is this investment worth the cost?

This is still a difficult question for me to

answer. For those that are skeptical about the return on investment, I offer this thought for consideration:

How many non-profit organizations serious about accomplishing their mission don't utilize a newsletter or other publication to communicate to their supporters and to prospective supporters?

I can't think of any.

Should the OSGeo be an exception?

I'll finish this last section of the editor's footnote with a simple list of the reasons I feel it is important for us to continue producing a journal:

- 1) It provides the OSGeo with a voice and an opportunity to reach out to potential supporters and sponsors.
- 2) It provides excellent marketing for OSGeo software projects and local chapters.
- 3) It helps bring our diverse, global community together, by informing OSGeo members of the OSGeo activities taking place around the world.
- 4) It provides the opportunity for software projects to write quality

tutorials, project documentation, and case studies, which often not produced otherwise.

The Editor