

A home of our own



There are discussions going on about setting up a neutral international society to support the profession of managing oil industry technical data. This should combine input from the Professional Petroleum Data Managers Association (PPDM), Energistics, ECIM, DAMA, SEG and a number of other industry

organisations. I have no participation in any such group at the moment, but I'm ready to contribute when the time is right and as soon as an announcement is made I would probably join. There are two groups that don't see that such organisation is needed.

Firstly there are those who think that geoscientists have absolutely nothing to learn from data professionals. The extremes of this view are those who think if you've not worked on the rigs you don't understand subsurface data, and if you have worked on rigs you have nothing left to learn. This is a reiteration of the idea that data management is an "easy option", to be performed by "technicians" who are not able to stretch themselves to doing "real work" (like, for example, geology, geophysics and drilling). This attitude, which in my opinion is much too prevalent in our industry, really makes me quite cross. Organisations can't afford to be so narrow, they have to blend insights from those who have grubby overalls with accountants, facility designers, IT architects, and, yes, even data handling professionals. I suspect every professional data custodian has experienced the frustration of explaining good data handling to a geoscientist unwilling to accept new concepts. I believe that any reasonable person would accept that there are important aspects of technical data handling that are not taught in Geology courses. In other words that the discipline of "data management" exists, needs concentrated study to master, and can provide significant value to oil companies.

The other objection to setting up an independent organisation comes from almost the exactly opposite point of view. I've had data managers from other industries ask why the oil industry needs its own association. Their starting point is that since DAMA defines the topic for so many industries it should do so for subsurface technical data as well. Now I have some sympathy for that viewpoint, every industry has unique aspects to the way they handle data, but the oil industry is particularly distinct. If you've seen some of my previous discussions you will be aware of my view on this. The way that technical E&P data is manipulated, with a plethora of isolated specialists each with sufficient funding to allow customised application software, means that the key data is spread across a range of different repositories. This has resulted in a landscape where the data flows from one application to another, while in many other industries the different applications share the data between them.

We need a professional society for three connected reasons: firstly to ensure that the rest of the oil industry can identify who has this knowledge, in other words to make sure that anyone who claims to be a competent E&P data custodian has at least some familiarity with the topic; secondly to give credibility to those pursuing it as a career option; and, finally to gather and summarise the lore, ensuring that things that work are encouraged and, more importantly, things that have failed in the past do not need to be repeated.