

## INTERVIEW: GREG BENTLEY

US software house Bentley Systems opened its new headquarters in London last week with representatives from major clients including Crossrail and Thames Water among the first through the door. Chief executive Greg Bentley tells **Antony Oliver** why the UK infrastructure market excites him right now.

**W**hen Bentley Systems chief executive Greg Bentley joined the firm in 1991 he was one of just 35 staff developing and distributing design software for infrastructure professionals based around its core MicroStation platform.

Today the software company serves architects, engineers, geospatial professionals, contractors and clients across the world. It has over 3,000 employees in 45 countries and revenues of more than \$500M (£316M) from its multi-sector design and management tools.

"We've never used the term computer aided design," explains Bentley referring to the firm's growing suite of services. "Our business is focused on sustaining infrastructure – that is basically everything engineers build to improve the planet."

But clearly the appetite for design software has mushroomed since the firm was first started by Greg Bentley's brothers Keith and Barry in 1984.

Their first iteration of the MicroStation platform really kick-started the migration of computing from cumbersome and expensive mainframe environments to newly emerging personal computers.

Over the years the firm has grown organically and through acquisition of niche outfits

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across the highways, surveying, structural design and architecture sectors to cover the full range of design, modelling, visualisation and project integration tools across the whole built environment market.

In this time the firm has built up a major client base of users across the US and Europe – underlined by last week's opening of a dedicated London headquarters for its 195 staff in the UK.

However, most recently its efforts have been to target emerging nations to provide the tools as they grapple to build the infrastructure that will underpin economic growth.

"In 2010 all our organic growth came from the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) region, but in 2011 we are seeing some organic growth elsewhere," he explains pointing out that analysis of its software utilisation patterns give a good forecast of market conditions and demonstrate that UK is one such area.

That said, it is clear that the emerging BRIC markets will continue to drive Bentley's revenues. Last year it saw revenues in China grow by 117%, in Russia by 44%, India by 16% and Brazil by 17%.

However, Greg Bentley insists that the decision to open a new fixed base in London underlines his belief that the UK and London in particular will also continue to drive forward with infrastructure.

"London will be the focal point or investment," he says highlighting that Bentley now has 195 people in the UK.

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# BENTLEY



**Victoria upgrade:** Bentley's MicroStation and ProjectWise software in use

### GREG BENTLEY'S CAREER

- **Founder and CEO:** Devon Systems International – a provider of financial trading software.
- **1991:** Joins his four founding brothers at Bentley Systems, when the company had 35 colleagues.
- **1987:** Devon Systems International bought by SunGard Data Systems. Remained as a director until its sale in 2005.
- **Education:** Degree in Decision Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, and an MBA in Finance from the Wharton School.



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PelicanCorp uses simple RFID enabled devices to locate and plot the location of underground services.

Meanwhile, Bentley hopes that its Navigator suite will enable users to really embrace the UK government’s strategic aim to ensure that every public project utilises Building Information Modelling (BIM) by 2015.

“The BIM mandate by UK by 2015 is sensible but it will need collaboration,” he says pointing out that the recently released ProjectWise Business Process Template for BS 1192 is designed specifically to streamline workflows and boost collaboration and reduce project costs.

“The future of BIM is not just about 3D models but about collaborative working because there is never just one model,” he says highlighting the growth of so-called “hyper-models” that co-locate and enable interrogation of numerous different data sets.

It is not hands off for construction but very much hands on using an array of new devices.”

Growth remains on the agenda for Bentley as it attempts to continue to ride the wave of delivering more for less and greater value to clients.

The recent purchase of offshore structure analysis firm SACS should, explains Bentley, give the firm a great lead into the potentially lucrative offshore wind market underpinning the work that they already do in the fossil fuel power sectors.

But organic growth remains core to the firm’s plans and at the heart of this is the continuation of its policy to invest 20% of revenue back into research and development each year – a policy that has invested \$1bn (£633M) in new ideas since 1991.

ture, he says, contrasts starkly with that adopted by the US. Despite President Obama’s recent American Jobs Act commitment to a \$50bn (£31.6bn) infrastructure stimulus with cash going into roads, busways and rail maintenance and upgrades, he points out that the US still lacks an overarching plan to convert such investment into economic growth.

“Infrastructure isn’t for stimulus, it’s for sustaining economic growth,” he says, pointing out that just ploughing public cash into the market isn’t a long-term solution. “We need to invest more in physical infrastructure but the US hasn’t yet made infrastructure the subject of private investment.”

Bentley Systems’ latest Infrastructure 500 report flags up the top clients across the globe and as Bentley highlights, much of the \$13tr (£8.22tr) annual spend on infrastructure is private.

“It is right to expect that 75% of investment will be private,” he says. “Yet by comparison to the UK, the US stands in the way of private [infrastructure] investment. I wish that we were encouraging PPP in the States as a means to drive growth. Stimulus isn’t going to create it.”

Right now in London Bentley software is at the heart of both the on-going Crossrail project, the largest construction project in Europe, and the Thames Tideway Tunnel, which is in planning and aiming towards a 2013 start date.

Over the last decade and more the original MicroStation platform for infrastructure design and modelling has been supplemented with the ProjectWise platform for infrastructure project team collaboration and work sharing, and the AssetWise platform for infrastructure asset operations.

The latter, explains Bentley,

provides a very interesting and potential growth market as client increasingly seek better ways to manage and maintain their infrastructure assets.

New products such as the “Roadworks Online” service delivered within Bentley’s AssetWise platform hope to utilise existing highway data to give the contractors, the public and businesses greater visibility to on-going road works, network disruption and travel times, thereby delivering a better service to the public.

“It is not now simply about what things look like but how they perform,” he says, highlighting that every local authority and central government department now has to demonstrate it is managing its assets effectively. “It’s about working smarter together.”

Similarly the new Intelligent Trench Service – a service set up in collaboration with 3M and