I is for inspirational!

With the release of Bentley Microstation V8*i*, the company can truly lay claim to offering a 'full' solution to all sectors of the construction and infrastructure industries, says David Chadwick

There is a point in the evolution of any technology when it becomes the norm and not the spectacle. It happened with cars and aeroplanes ("I'm not going up in one of those things!") and now of course people think nothing of jumping in the car to pop down to the newsagents, or booking a flight to the USA or Japan with hardly more consideration or effort!

The wonder and excitement of wheeling out the old saloon and setting off on a distant journey, and the joy of arriving at your destination without having suffered a puncture or other mechanical breakdown has been replaced by total expectation that the journey will pass without undue incident. You expect the car to do its job.

Software technology comes with the same expectations. You expect it to perform efficiently, and to address the issues that caused you to buy it in the first place. CAD software now allows you to design the most complex structures, and all of the most recent developments are tinkering round the edges to add a little extra bit of functionality here, or add a new tool there. For those who have moved to BIM, looking back at what they used to do in the not too distant past must seem like harking back to a more primitive existence!

Yet, there needs to be another step that turns a mere tool into a vital appendage! That can only be achieved by bringing together all of the different technologies that are involved in a construction project, and making them work seamlessly together.

The possibility has been eased with each separate technology following similar principles - the accumulation and re-use of process knowledge. It's quite funny really, we have already started to redefine the BIM acronym depending upon the market segment we are looking at, with FIM (Fabrication Information Modelling) potentially being followed by GIM (Geographical IM) or TIM (Terrain IM). Now all we need is for these attempts to define each individual knowledge base to be brought together, in a way that their use becomes second nature - wherever you start from.

MICROSTATION V8*i*

And that is the main philosophy behind the latest version of Bentley's core modelling solution, V8*i* - to whit, interoperability. It is designed to cut across the whole range of Bentley's portfolio, filling in the gaps in a process that has seen the recent announcement of a cross-licencing agreement with Autodesk, with dedicated technical liaison between the two companies, the ability to share native code, and the use of Revit to MicroStation links.

OpenPlant, Bentley's open P&ID solution, is another instance, and so is the ability to aggregate data from multiple Bentley and non-Bentley applications in the structural steel industry, and, again, the support for all business standards and building performance tools, helping construction companies comply with the growing demand for sustainable construction.

When you stack that up with the rest of Bentley's products - the extensive solutions covered by Geospatial technology and its land development tools, its water management tools, civil engineering