

Surveying the future: A framework for business model innovation in the land surveying industry

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SUMMARY

Land surveying firms are under increasing pressure to adapt their business models in response to technological disruption, market consolidation, and a critical shortage of skilled professionals. While land surveying plays a foundational role in managing the built environment, limited research exists on how firms in this sector can tactically evolve to remain competitive and resilient.

This study investigates the constraints inhibiting business model innovation in the land surveying industry through a two-phase qualitative research design. First, a systematic content analysis of 149 North America firm websites was conducted to find dominant business model archetypes. This was followed by 15 semi-structured interviews with firm owners and decision-makers across different specializations and sizes, offering qualitative insight into business challenges, operational models, and developing innovation practices.

The outcomes reveal four recurring business model types—ranging from local sole proprietors to large, multi-disciplinary engineering firms—each facing unique pressures from technology commoditization and workforce attrition. While many firms stay profitable under traditional models, this often masks long-term vulnerability to non-surveyor competitors and devaluation of core services. Innovative firms are responding by repositioning their value propositions toward consulting, risk mitigation, and using data as an asset, rather than focusing solely on measurement and delivery.

Drawing on tactics from innovative firms, this research identifies the important barriers to innovation and proposes a new framework designed to overcome these constraints by repositioning the surveyors' value proposition. It proposes a foundation for rethinking how land surveying firms can align their business strategies with evolving market demands.

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