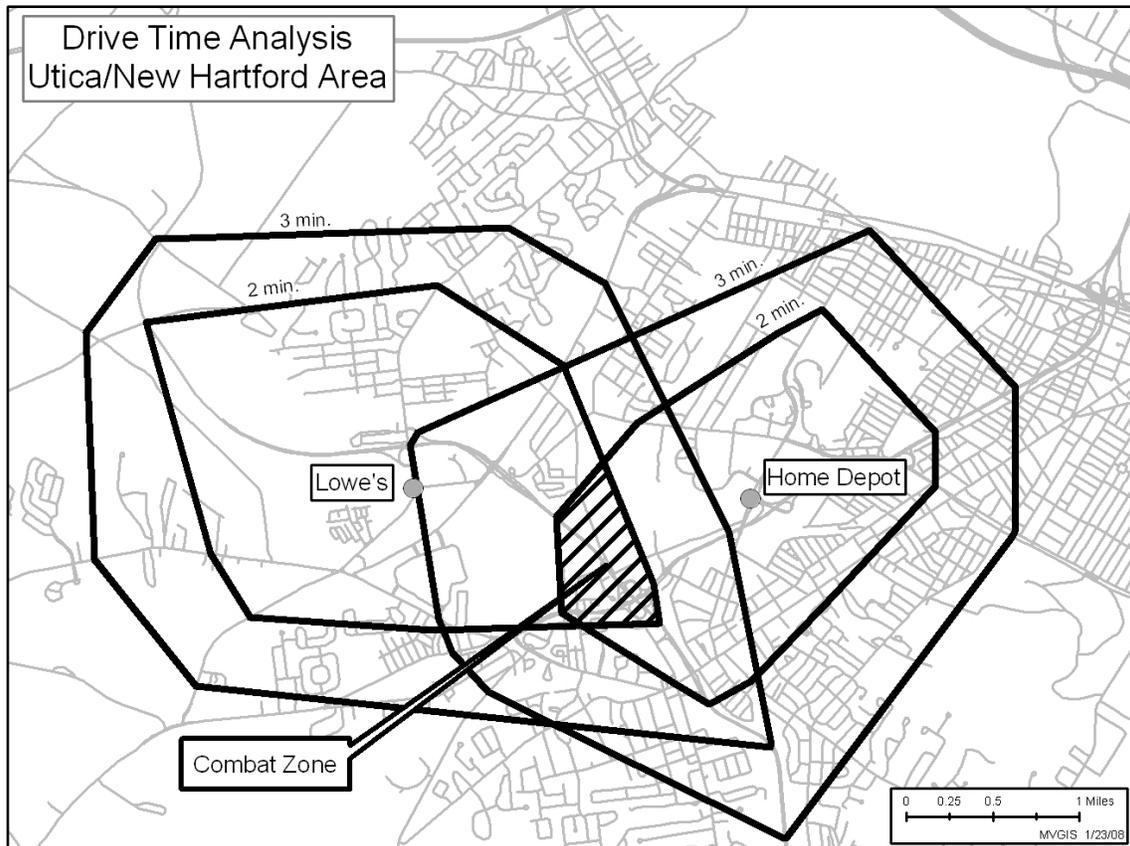**GIS Can Help Your Target Marketing Efforts**

What is GIS? Is that something like GPS? Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are both part of the rapidly exploding field of geospatial technologies.

Maybe you have used MapQuest or Google Maps for directions. Perhaps you have been in a rental car and have found your way using Hertz NeverLost®. These are applications within the broad technologies of GIS and GPS, respectively.

How can GIS help me target customers? GIS is a powerful computer-based tool that appears as a collection of spreadsheets and maps on your computer's monitor. Any data that has locations, be it a street address, a zip code, or a latitude/longitude, can be used within the GIS.

The end result is one or more visuals that effectively communicate your message, solve your problem, or illustrate what-if scenarios. Visuals are much easier to comprehend at a glance than tables of numbers, and visual information is retained longer.

Back to the target marketing example. The sample map below shows a drive-time analysis for Lowe's and Home Depot in the New Hartford area. Anyone can take a map and a ruler and draw circles representing distance from each store location, as the crow flies. But what about as the crow walks, seeing that we humans have yet to evolve wings? Here is where the GIS struts its stuff.

Drive Time Analysis
Utica/New Hartford Area

3 min.

2 min.

3 min.

2 min.

Lowe's

Home Depot

Combat Zone

0   0.25   0.5   1 Miles

MVGIS 1/23/08

Feed it the right streets data, add a competitor's location along with your own, press a few buttons, and voilà. An easy to read map showing the "combat zone."

The combat zone is the area of potential customers sitting on the fence. The time to get to your store versus your competitor's store is the same in the combat zone. Certainly, people who live off French Road next to Home Depot will go to Home Depot rather than drive the extra 10 minutes to get to Lowe's. No point marketing to them if you are Lowe's.

You have already spent money on a mailing list for the greater Utica area? No problem. Once the GIS derives your combat zone, it is just a few more button presses to extract those records from your mailing list that fall within the combat zone.

GIS is used in business, government, natural resources management, health and human services, and the transportation and utilities industries, to name a few. The key is spatial. As long as the data has a location, GIS can be used as an effective tool.

Linda Rockwood is owner of Mohawk Valley GIS in Herkimer, NY and can be reached through www.mohawkvalleygis.com or by calling 315-866-2746.