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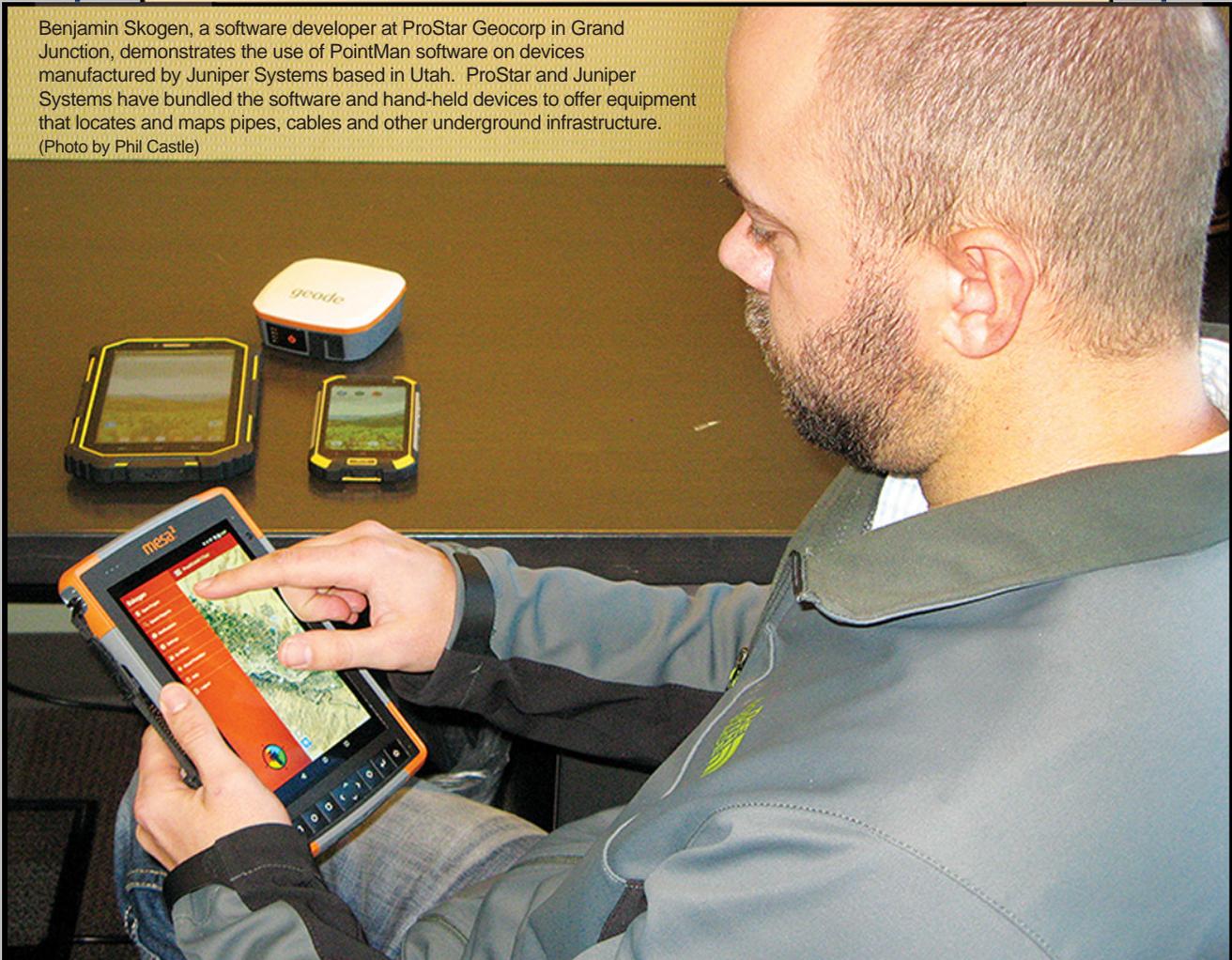
Firms partner to bundle software and devices that map buried utilities

■ **Executive of Grand Junction company praises collaboration as another way to grow business**

Benjamin Skogen, a software developer at ProStar Geocorp in Grand Junction, demonstrates the use of PointMan software on devices manufactured by Juniper Systems based in Utah. ProStar and Juniper Systems have bundled the software and hand-held devices to offer equipment that locates and maps pipes, cables and other underground infrastructure. (Photo by Phil Castle)

Firms bundle software and devices to map underground utilities

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Companies in Grand Junction and Utah have bundled user-friendly software with rugged computers to offer equipment that maps pipes, cables and other underground utilities.

The collaboration between ProStar Geocorp and Juniper Systems could lead to not only increased sales, but also additional uses for the equipment and new markets, said Page Tucker, president and chief executive officer of ProStar in Grand Junction. "It's big. It's really big."

Trevor Brown, business development manager for Juniper Systems, agreed. He said the software works well with the computers and other devices manufactured by the company in Logan, Utah. "It just kind of fits within our mission."

Page Tucker, CEO ProStar Geocorp

Under the partnership, ProStar offers PointMan software on hand-held tablets and other mobile devices manufactured by Juniper Systems. The equipment can be used with locater devices and a Geode global positioning system receiver to create digital maps of underground utilities that can be shared.

Brown said the combination offers an efficient and affordable way to not only locate buried utilities, but also create precise maps. That process also eliminates the need and expense of hiring third party companies to map utilities.

Brown said Juniper Systems approached ProStar about the collaboration after customers inquired about the PointMan software.

The software is easy to use and works well with locater devices, the GPS receiver and Juniper Systems data collection devices, he said.

Juniper Systems brings to the partnership hand-held computers and other devices designed to be used outdoors and endure harsh conditions. The company also offers technical support to help customers use the equipment, Brown said.

Tucker said the partnership with Juniper System constitutes another step for ProStar in growing business.

The company combines geographic information systems and data to offer computer software and services that help customers manage infrastructure, whether it's displaying, collecting, storing or using information about the location of pipelines, fiber optic cables or other facilities. ProStar has developed a niche market for what are known in the energy sector as midstream companies that transport oil, natural gas and other products.

ProStar can provide information not only on computers, but also smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices that can be used in the field. The company has added to its capabilities in developing software that uses augmented reality. Unlike virtual reality, augmented reality combines computer-generated images with what's perceived in the real world. Tucker said he envisions a day when crews working in the field using headsets or other displays will "see" buried utilities as if they possessed X-ray vision.

ProStar also has joined in a pilot project to make a Grand Junction a model for more precisely locating and managing underground utilities. The City of Grand Junction as well as the Colorado Department of Transportation and Colorado 811 utility location and notification service have joined in the effort.

Different utilities maintain records about the locations of underground utilities, but are sometimes reluctant to share information, Tucker said. It's a question of storing information in way that can be shared, but also remains secure. ProStar offers expertise in just that, he said.

That information is useful in not only maintaining infrastructure, but also planning for growth, Tucker said. The technology also can be used to combine mapping and information in computer models, he said — taking into account information about flood plains, mountain snowpack levels and weather forecasts to predict the possibility of flooding, for example.

Meanwhile, there's the potential to use the software and equipment ProStar and Juniper Systems have bundled for other purposes.

Benjamin Skogen, a software developer at ProStar who worked with Juniper System, said the combination would work well for any task that requires capturing and mapping information. That could range from forest management to law enforcement and using hand-held devices to complete accident reports on site.