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Less than a year after combining several leading mining software and technology firms, Sweden-listed Hexagon CEO Ola Rollén's wish for a flagship mine operations management software product has taken shape in the form of HxM Athena, which will get some exposure at this week's Mining Indaba in Cape Town.

Richard Roberts | 07 Feb 2015 | 20:17 | Feature |

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Hexagon CEO Ola Rollén ... HxM Athena launch a key strategic move forward in mining for Swedish company

Actually, it's a new shape. HxM Athena builds on the MineSight Performance Manager (MSPM) product of Mintec, which Hexagon bought last year. At that point the new owner immediately set about integrating MSPM with the mine fleet management system technology and know-how it got hold of via another acquisition, that of Brazil's Devex, and several other Mintec and Hexagon products. The US-based Mintec had been in the mine-software business for 40 years and recently hit on the possibilities for realising value out of combining mine productivity, engineering and planning data.

"We now need to connect the design phase and the planning phases in the mining operation with operations, such as fleet management, surveying and so on, so we're really excited about having MineSight," Rollén said at the time.

Hexagon has significantly ramped up the product development and marketing focus for its new mining vertical, at the same time opening up greater distribution power for the former SafeMine, Devex, Mintec, Jigsaw and Leica mining product lines it assembled under the Hexagon Mining banner launched in the US in the middle of last year.

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Rollén said he wanted to double Hexagon Mining sales of about US\$150 million – presumably as quickly as possible, though he, like many others, faces severe market headwinds at present.

Getting back to the then barely road-mapped HxM Athena, he said big data was a buzz-phrase for miners as it was for other industries.

“What I do believe in is connectivity. I think that we need to connect planners, operators, executives, maintenance people and so on in the operation of a mine, and I think as you connect them and you bring them together and they all share the same information, that is when you see productivity happening,” Rollén said. “So whether you call it big data or simply connecting people, I’d prefer to connect people actually.”

MSPM provided a platform for a centralised reporting and an analytical toolset tailored to mining needs. A senior Hexagon Mining product manager said HxM Athena imported, validated, analysed and stored data from multiple sources, in a single data repository. It then presented the data in dashboard views that were easy to use and understand.

“People still work in site-based silos and don’t think about the cost to the business downstream based on decisions made in their area,” Mark Gabbitus, Hexagon Mining senior product manager –geology and operations, told *Mining Journal*.

“A classic example is drill and blast. They are expected to get broken dirt ready for mining as quickly and as cheaply as they can. This leads to poor fragmentation, dig rates and mineral recovery costing the business millions.

“There has always been a lot of data generated in mining but we are starting to find it is being entered into databases more and more.

“Big data or the data deluge is relatively new to mining, but it has been around for a while in other industries. Essentially we are now collecting more data than ever before in mining, but we don’t know how to use it. Things like dig point GPS locations, dig rates, penetration rates from drill rigs, etc, are all now being collected in real time and stored in databases, often totally separate databases owned by different teams.

“Extracting the useful bits of information from this mix of databases is where [HxM Athena] comes in.”

Gabbitus said HxM Athena provided users with both business intelligence and business analytics, and was central to the company’s plans to connect with enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems.

Chances are Mining Indaba attendees will also hear more from Hexagon Mining chief marketing officer Dr Peter Stegmaier about HxM Blast, another product due to be officially launched in April. Gabbitus said HxM Blast replaced and enhanced the functionality of the popular MineSight Blast Pattern Editor, and was aimed at drill and blast engineers.

“Future versions will add blasting, tie-in and blast optimisation features, which will enable operations to blast smarter and more efficiently,” he said.

Another Hexagon project that is bubbling away is HxM Live Terrain, said to “assemble other technologies” from Leica equipment to Intergraph software and combine them with data “truthing” and processing software to build a database of all relevant data, ranked by fidelity. Users will be able to select an area for which they need the latest terrain surface, and HxM Live Terrain “will deliver it”.

This is seen to offer a much-needed tool for rationalising a vital mine data source – the topography surface as it is continually measured and mined – potentially producing benefits in work areas ranging from mine planning and fleet management, to environment and slope monitoring, reconciliation, autonomous mining, and regulatory compliance.

Western Australia-based Gabbitus said the software business was slow in Australia, better elsewhere.

“In the US and South America we’re doing really well,” he said.

“A few years ago it was the other way around.”

Smooth integration of the different software lines had been helped by painless joining of the different technology businesses.



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"There were a lot of pieces and people to bring together," Gabbitus said. "Each company before the integration had their own priorities, so we've had to work through various requirements and make sure we're all ready to roll. It's actually been really collaborative – possibly more than at other companies.

"Everyone we talk to [in the market], they're all [talking] about process improvement, cost reductions, and really that's what Athena and Blast were developed to address. We're trying to help mining companies do things smarter, better and cheaper, and helping them identify where they've got problems in their mining process.

"So if that's what everyone says they want, hopefully they're prepared to pay for it. That's the challenge I guess."

Tags: [Devex](#), [HxM Athena](#), [HxM Blast](#), [Jigsaw](#), [Mark Gabbitus](#), [Mintec](#), [Ola Rollen](#), [SAFEmine](#)

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