

Geospatial Services – Reaching out to New Markets

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EARSC (the European Association for Remote Sensing Companies) is the European trade association dealing with the geospatial services sector. Formed in 1989, we have been acting for 25 years on behalf of the geospatial services industries in Europe and particularly those dealing in the generation of geo content. Our members are mainly from the EO services sector but also from aircraft operators and companies supplying geospatial services. Our mission is to foster the development of the European Geo-Information Services Industry.

The geospatial market is new and still not fully understood. Despite its importance to policy making, governments have not yet embraced this technology as a key information source and one of the roles of EARSC is to promote its wider use. But we are not constrained to government or public-sector use, our interests extend to promotion into other commercial sectors as exemplified by our work with the Oil and Gas Producers Association and into export markets where customers may be from the public or private sector.

Remote sensing from a remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) is a maturing technology, which offers many complementary capabilities to satellites and aircraft. RPA is another form of platform to carry sensors tuned to observe various characteristics of the earth's surface. Whilst satellites provide a large-scale synoptic view, RPA complement this with fine-scale, local observations and flexibility to be deployed at short notice. Indeed, some large RPA may even operate autonomously for long periods and covering quite large areas.

When EARSC was formed in 1989, satellite based remote sensing of the Earth's surface was a relatively new technology with only a few scientific missions having been launched. The advent of digital sensors and the exponential increase in computing power and storage through the 90's coupled with communication networks and the internet has brought broad public awareness of geospatial products. Now as RPAS technology starts to become more readily available, it offers the possibility of further, complementary observations.

Meanwhile other technologies such as cloud, crowd sourcing and mobile offer even more powerful means to gather and exchange data as the focus of interest moves away from data and towards information. The trends in the industry are fast and furious and offer a challenge to all stakeholders.

EARSC's mission is to help the industry develop and we are tackling this in several ways:

Firstly, we offer companies the possibility to promote themselves and their capabilities. We have developed a web-site called *eopages* (www.eopages.eu), which provides a brokerage service for potential customers looking for services. The site allows companies to enter details of the products and services, which they offer, as well as examples of where these have been used – in the form of success stories. Potential clients can search according to the market sector in which they work and type of problem they are trying to solve to find which companies can help. Eopages will then allow them to contact each other to hold a conversation.

Secondly, we have been working with some industry sectors to develop their knowledge of EO Services. Most particularly, we have worked with the Oil and Gas producers' industry association (OGP) to establish a platform for exchange through a Portal which we call OGEO. The OGEO portal

(www.ogeo-portal.eu) is open to qualified persons coming from the two sectors and provides a facility for users to interact in communities of common interest. It includes a wiki of geospatial applications to help O&G users to gain knowledge on what can be done. This community approach is also being developed with other sectors, such as insurance and with International Financial Institutions. We believe it is a very strong way to help the sector get its messages across.

The third service offered is through dedicated conferences and workshops. Often we will work with other organisations to enable both users and suppliers to come together for an exchange around specific topics. An example is a workshop on certification in the industry. Other meetings have been with specific users coming from local government and users from alternative energy sector.

The fourth area is to advocate to policy makers on specific topics of importance to the industry. Last year we made a study into the benefits of free and open data from the Copernicus Sentinel satellites and were very active in addressing some concerns within the consequent legislation for Copernicus. This year we are looking at the Copernicus services and on other legislation such as that for high resolution satellites as well as linking to initiatives like Inspire or Open data.

A fifth area is to try to encourage research projects and we have launched a virtual community to try to help potential project partners for Horizon 2020 projects to find each other. The "Research Corner" can be found at www.earsc-portal.eu.

Each of these actions is technology and especially platform neutral; our goal is to support members increase their business. Membership of EARSC is open to any company dealing in remote sensing technology and, although our focus is very much on the services being offered, understanding this market is equally important to developers of the systems. The mastery of information coming from any of these platforms will be an important competence for geospatial service providers in the future.