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<Commercial Remote Sensing>

U.S. Commercial Imagery Firms Expanding Web-based Services

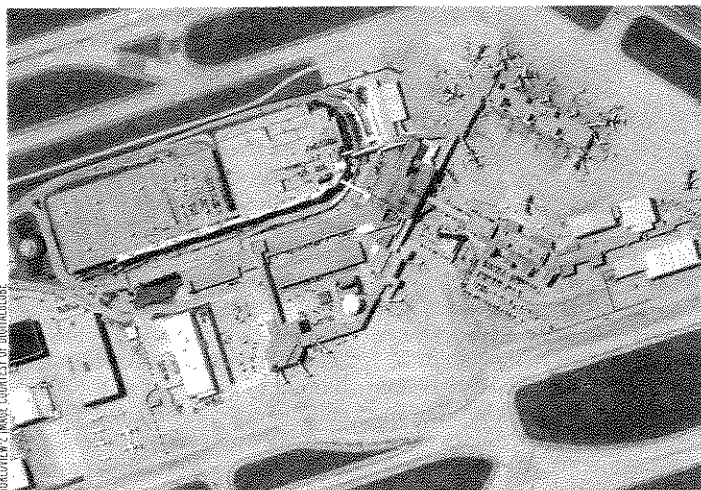
TURNER BRINTON, WASHINGTON

With their latest imaging satellites fully operational and sending back reams of data, DigitalGlobe and GeoEye are focused on expanding their customer bases and using the Internet to push their products to users more quickly and efficiently.

Both DigitalGlobe of Longmont, Colo., and GeoEye of Dulles, Va., are now delivering high-quality satellite imagery over the Internet to their primary U.S. government customer, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). The firms announced in June 2009 they had been put under contract for the agency's Rapid Delivery of Online Geospatial-Intelligence, or RDOG, program.

The companies' RDOG contracts have expired but the agency is in the process of renewing them, NGA spokeswoman Sue Meisner said in a May 21 e-mail response to questions.

DigitalGlobe has been offering its imagery over the Internet since 2007, when it acquired online mapping firm GlobeXplorer of Walnut Creek, Calif., Walter Scott, DigitalGlobe's founder and chief technical officer, said in a May 20 interview. DigitalGlobe launched the WorldView-2 satellite in October 2009, which joined the Quickbird and WorldView-1 satellites on



WorldView-2 image of the Dallas Love Field airport in Texas

orbit. The firm now has more than 1 billion square kilometers of imagery in its archive.

Under the RDOG program, DigitalGlobe is delivering unclassified imagery of specified areas to U.S. government users anywhere in the world within 24 hours of collection, the company said last year. It is also tasked with providing sets of nearly cloud-free images of entire countries updated on a quarterly basis.

GeoEye's initial RDOG contract required the company to produce and deliver a high-resolution digital imagery set of an unspecified country. After receiving a contract modification in February, the

company went live with its first foray into online imagery dissemination to government users April 1, according to a May 10 GeoEye filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

GeoEye's RDOG work will enable the company to begin offering a similar Web-based services platform, dubbed EyeQ, to commercial customers later this year, the filing said. Rather than selling imagery by the square kilometer, GeoEye will offer the service with multiyear subscriptions and user licenses, the company said. The commercial Web-based offering will target users in the oil and gas, mining, engineering, construc-

tion and public safety industries.

GeoEye spokesman Mark Brender declined to make company officials available for an interview. GeoEye launched its newest and most capable satellite, GeoEye-1, in September 2008.

In addition to satellite imagery, DigitalGlobe's government and commercial customers are able to access aerial imagery over the Internet, Scott said. DigitalGlobe in October announced a partnership with Microsoft to collect 30-centimeter aerial imagery of the entire United States and Western Europe. This is significant because of the restrictions placed on the commercial sale of satellite imagery, he said. DigitalGlobe can collect satellite imagery with ground resolutions as sharp as 46 centimeters — meaning objects of that size or larger can be distinguished — but the U.S. government bars commercial sales of imagery sharper than 50 centimeters in resolution. There are no such restrictions on aerial imagery.

Since the GlobeXplorer acquisition, DigitalGlobe has been steadily upgrading its online services offering. The company is in the process of making "a large fraction of the surface of the planet" available over the Web, and has focused on complying with many of the common standards used with geospatial software tools, Scott

said. As new images are collected and uploaded to the online library, previous images of the same locations are kept intact so that users can do temporal analysis — which focuses on changes over time — as well as spatial analysis, he said.

Meanwhile, in response to customer demands for more-current imagery, DigitalGlobe recently established a European node where data can be prestage and distributed to users more quickly. This enables some users to receive imagery just seconds after it is uploaded into the online database, Scott said.

DigitalGlobe's Web services offering shows the effectiveness and efficiency of the company's hybrid government-commercial business model, Scott said.

"It's kind of like climbing up a ladder," he said. "You put one foot on top of the other, and then you move up to the next rung. What ends up happening is you have commercial capabilities that then lead to government capabilities and then turn around and lead back to commercial capabilities."

"One of the things we find very powerful about our business is because we have a diverse customer base, one customer is often able to benefit from what we have done to support another group of customers. It's far more powerful than where you've got only one kind of customer."