



A Talk at the Booth during the ISPRS Congress in Beijing An Interview with Geokosmos

It all started with a group of enthusiastic students from the Moscow State University of Geodesy and Cartography who decided to combine their efforts and create a private geodetic laboratory. The team, headed by Sergey Melnikov, aimed to put into practice their ideas in the fields of satellite-based geodesy, satellite-based navigation systems and precise positioning. At that time the development of satellite-based geodesy was just beginning. Their initial efforts were focused on investigating the first prototype satellite receivers designed in the USSR for experimental determination of ground surface coordinates.

By Ruud Groothuis

And now, 15 years later, Geokosmos is a leading surveying and mapping company based in Russia, offering laser scanning and aerial digital photography technologies for different applications. As a truly international operation with subsidiaries and business partners worldwide, Geokosmos primarily serves customers in the following areas: power lines, oil and gas, highways and railroads, forestry, government, and coastal and marine. Applications include traditional aerial topog-

raphy, cadastres, and 3D urban modeling in conjunction with LIDAR data capture. The company's current turnover can be divided into 50% governmental (of which 50% is federal and 50% local) and 50% corporate.

An interview with Sergey Melnikov, founder and president of Geokosmos, reveals that passion and commitment to the industry offers lots of opportunities. Mr. Melnikov, an enthusiastic and realistic

man, is president of a company that has shown double-digit growth over the past several years. Every company with such rapid growth faces managerial and logistical 'problems' or challenges.

A clear view is needed in order to make things happen. Besides, operating from inside Russia, it is hard to conquer the world. One needs to 'speak' and understand the local/regional language in order to be suc-



Ruud Groothuis (l), Sergey Melnikov and
Jan Willem van de Vegt (r)

successful. The solution to this seems simple: join forces with a strong European company, for instance, to penetrate the European market. And there lies the solution for Geokosmos. Its recent strategic co-operation with Terralmaging is a good example of how to solve this problem, but it can come with its own set of challenges.

Terralmaging has a strong position both inside and outside Europe.

And here is the challenge: create synergy between the companies and effectively deal with the differences in culture and viewpoint which can sometimes be a struggle.

Geokosmos, however, asserts that these differences do not apply. And this can be said to be unique since these kinds of co-operative efforts often don't succeed.

When talking with Jan Willem van der Vegt, Managing Director of Terralmaging, and Mr. Melnikov, I heard just the right arguments and comments which assured me that the two cul-

tures, combined with knowledge and a passion for the industry, will without a doubt form a very strong base for success. Competitors like BLOM and Fugro also have undertaken joint ventures in order to increase their capabilities and remain at the forefront of the market.

From Terralmaging's point of view, it is necessary to maintain its position and realize growth in order to compete. The company has first-rate brand strength, goodwill, experience, and excellent standing within the industry. All the more reason for Geokosmos to co-operate strategically with Terralmaging. Active outside Europe, Geokosmos has carried out projects in Asia and India and, most recently, has finalized a major LIDAR project in Vietnam.

In order to be successful in South Asia and Southeast Asia as well, Geokosmos appointed Mr. Abineet Jain, an experienced professional who has been given the challenge of extending Geokosmos' reach even further. It's a completely different market, of course. Aerial surveying, for instance, comes with a different set of problems in Asia compared with those found in a place like Europe. Government rules and restrictions make it harder: importing and exporting equipment is much more difficult, one has to fly with military people on board the aircraft, and, also important, there is a restricted image resolution. There are also constraints regarding governmental budgets. However, Mr. Jain is positive about the market in this part of the world and the first tenders are already up and running. Hopefully at MapIndia in February next year Mr. Jain will have success stories to present!

During the ISPRS Congress, Geokosmos also announced that it has signed a purchase agreement with Vexcel Imaging GmbH for an UltraCamX (UCX) large-format digital aerial camera system. Vexcel's distributor in the region, Geolidar, represented Vexcel in the sale. This unit is the 100th UltraCam sold worldwide. For the past 15 years, Geokosmos has conducted its aerial imaging with medium-format digital cameras, a large-format UltraCamD camera from Vexcel, and LIDAR sensors. "Because of our excellent working relationship with Vexcel in the past and our experience with the UltraCamD, the UltraCamX was the only choice for us," explained Mr. Melnikov.

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