

Growing new EO data markets will require user-friendly approaches, say executives

by [Tereza Pultarova](#) — September 14, 2017



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PARIS — Providing a user-friendly experience together with in-depth understanding of customers’ needs will be key for the growth of Earth-observation data use in new markets in the upcoming years, according to industry leaders.

Speaking at the World Satellite Business Week here Sept. 14, top executives of the leading players in the Earth-observation data market agreed that the sector has a huge growth potential.

New constellations and satellites will not be a threat to commercial Earth observation’s established players, they concluded, but rather a needed contribution as by far not enough data is currently available to create applications with a potential to revolutionize multiple sectors including agriculture, insurance and finance markets, and infrastructure asset management.

However, to take a full advantage of the available data, the satellite operators would either have to develop the data analytics side of their business or partner with companies with the know-how

to extract commercially interesting information from the imagery. Luckily, the fast-paced developments in artificial intelligence and deep learning algorithms are likely going to facilitate the developments.

“We see convergence between the different sectors,” said François Lombard, head of intelligence business at Airbus. “This is a very exciting time, lots of innovation, lots of appetite for new ways of doing the business, lots of incentive for partnerships as well.”

Airbus announced earlier this week that the company’s planned laser-communication-equipped very high-resolution-imaging constellation Pléiades Neo is on schedule for launch in 2020.

The nature of global challenges, such as climate change, natural disasters or feeding the world’s growing population, will drive the need for further cooperation, the executives agreed. The likeliest approach, according to the panellists, will be for individual companies to develop in-depth expertise in specific sectors while seeking partners to help develop applications in other areas.

“This is something that we need to all together,” Lombard said. “You need the right data, you need the right channel to market. We can’t do all at once so there are segments that we want to take.”

Jeffrey Tarr, CEO of DigitalGlobe, which earlier this year acquired data-analytics company Radiant and signed its own acquisition by MDA Corp. agreed: “I don’t remember another time when more is going on that we are contributing to collectively than we are doing right now,” he said, citing the North Korea crisis, wars in the Middle East, as well as natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes as examples of situations far too complex to be handled with data provided by a single satellite operator.

“If we find ways of working together, this is a very exciting time for our industry,” he said.

While the traditional government and military markets are still hungry for more high-quality data, the real growth is expected to come from new sectors, which have traditionally not used Earth-observation imagery to drive decision-making processes.

“Our traditional base business continues with moderate growth, clearly not growing as fast as we would like,” said David Belton, general manager at MDA Geospatial Services.

“But we are clearly seeing a much greater diversification of the number of non-traditional customers that we hope will become our future traditional customers and a much larger customer base.”

Earlier this week, MDA announced a contract to supply near-real-time forest-monitoring data to the world’s largest pulp and paper group APP.

The panelists said that within the next five years, revenue from new digital services and verticals could make up to 60 percent of their overall revenue.

The fast development of cloud storage and computing will further encourage the collaborative trends, enabling third parties to access the data online and develop applications.