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Opportunity knocks

Is British industry grasping the opportunities at home and abroad that present themselves in this golden age of remote sensing? Who better to ask than Alistair Maclenan, chair of the British Association of Remote Sensing Companies (BARSC)



Geoconnexion UK (Geo): *BARSC membership has remained fairly static for several years, a surprising situation given that, in Europe and according to last year's EARSC Survey*, the UK now has the most companies and organisations involved in remote sensing. To what do you attribute this situation and how is it being addressed?*

Alistair Maclenan (AM): You're quite right; the European remote sensing industry, and certainly here in the UK has seen a fantastic expansion in recent years and I expect that growth to continue. More earth observation data are finding more applications in a wider number of other industries.

This 'golden age' has been some time coming and BARSC was there during the leaner times, working to promote our member's interests and do what we could to develop opportunities. Those companies that were members then, are members now which is testament to the value of our services.

Our plan for 2014 is to expand the awareness of the existence of BARSC – we have discovered that people are simply unaware of the

Association so we have and continue to take steps to address that. We have a website that is very regularly updated with news and information, an email infoLetter, a LinkedIn Group and in recent times we have actively taken BARSC to the marketplace through attendance at trade shows. Once people know about us and understand what we do, they quickly become members.

Geo: *BARSC has been strengthening its ties with ESA and forging a close relationship with the Satellite Applications Catapult over the past year. How do you see these links evolving?*

AM: We are here for the benefit of our members. That means we have to be able to provide our members with industry insight. ESA and the Satellite Applications Catapult are of huge importance to any company working within the space-based earth observation industry, so it is vital that we are a route for our members to both organisations.

I would add the UK Space Agency to that list. Given their role at the heart of the government's efforts to support and develop the UK space industry, BARSC has worked closely with their staff to ensure a constant and mutually beneficial flow of information.

Geo: *According to the latest report from BCC Research, the global market for remote sensing products is expected to grow from \$7.6 to \$12.1 billion between now and 2019. How is the UK placed to capitalise*

on this growth? And how can BARSC help?



AM: Referring back to my previous answer, the UK has taken huge strides forwards recently to develop our share of the expected growth you mentioned. I know it isn't fashionable to praise politicians, but credit really must go to David Willets and his team for their enthusiastic support of the UK space market. The foundation of the UK Space Agency, the creation of the Satellite Applications Catapult, the establishment of ESA's European Centre for Space Applications and Telecommunications (ECSAT) at Harwell in Oxfordshire will all give a real boost to our home grown companies.

BARSC's role is simple; to continually promote the remarkable capabilities, expertise and knowledge that our members have to offer. Whilst we have always done this, we are currently developing new, exciting and efficient ways of taking these messages out the relevant marketplaces.

Geo: There are a proliferation of companies and individuals now engaged in offering UAV-derived imagery. Does BARSC welcome them as members, and what can it do to represent their interests (e.g. working with the CAA to ease restrictions on operating in UK airspace)?

AM: Absolutely! Remote sensing is certainly not restricted to space-based activities and for BARSC to remain relevant and influential it is imperative that we are able to speak for the widest number of companies. 'Traditional' air photography companies and the newer UAV organisations must be included within our membership. Again we need to make these companies aware of our existence, listen to their needs and develop our services in such a way as to make their membership valuable.

It is a key growth area for both the UK remote sensing industry and BARSC, so we will be working throughout 2014 to develop this side of our activities.

Geo: The first European Sentinel satellite is due for launch this year as part of the Copernicus (GMES) programme) and promises a deluge of new data, with the potential to create new services and markets. What is BARSC doing to support its members in this key EU programme?

AM: Copernicus is such an ambitious project. To put up numerous Sentinel satellites and combine the data from those with around 30 different other 'contributing missions' as well as 'in-situ' readings from ground-based weather stations, ocean buoys and other fixed sensors with the aim of creating of dataset that can support future decision making, is really big thinking. It is the kind of thinking all industries need.

Of course there have been delays but as you say, Sentinel-1 is now due for launch during the spring of this year and data will start being made available. It will be an important time as we have seen the impact that 'free' has had on other industries but I hope that the momentum that has built recently will be maintained.

Geo: Does the Association consider that rationalisation among Continental and US EO satellite operators will be of long-term benefit to

downstream UK players and end users?

AM: Whilst we certainly have seen consolidation, most notably the combination of Geo-Eye and DigitalGlobe, we have also seen a number of new commercial organisations enter the market and as we just discussed the emergence of free data from the Copernicus project. So whilst the remote sensing market will develop and change over time, I can only think that more companies and more available data is a good thing.

Geo: Does the Association believe that the present level of British Government investment in remote sensing (e.g. NovaSAR) sufficient?

AM: I would refer back to our earlier discussion regarding the establishment of both the UK Space Agency and the Satellite Applications Catapult, both of which signal a commitment to central government working in joint ventures with commercial organisations. BARSC's role is to ensure that it is our members who are at the head of queue when it comes to these partnerships.

*A Survey into the State and Health of the European EO Services Industry. Prepared by EARSC under assignment from ESA. September 2013 (Downloadable from: http://earsr.org/file_download/155/Industry+Survey+final+report+Sept2013+%C2%A9+EARSC.pdf)



ESA's ECSAT is based at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire (pictured left). Photo: UK Science and Technology Facilities Council

WEB LINKS	
British Association of Remote Sensing Companies	www.barsc.org.uk
European Association of Remote Sensing Companies	www.earsr.org
Satellite Applications Catapult	https://sa.catapult.org.uk/
UK Space Agency	www.bis.gov.uk/ukspaceagency
ESA European Centre for Space Applications and Telecommunications	www.esa.int/About_Us/Welcome_to_ESA/ECSAT
EU Copernicus (formerly GMES) Programme	www.esa.int/Our_Activities/Observing_the_Earth/Copernicus

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