

GIM INTERVIEWS REMI JEAN, PRESIDENT DVP-GS AND VICE-PRESIDENT AND PARTNER GROUPE ALTA

Photogrammetry out of the Dark Room

DVP-GS is a small Canada-based business founded in 1988 to market software products resulting from research into digital photogrammetry at Laval University. This month's interviewee, Remi Jean, president DVP-GS, is very optimistic about the future of photogrammetry: "It is only a question of time before we see a significant increase in the demand for quality data. Photogrammetry has definitely come out of the shadows - or the dark room!"

What are your main types of products and how much does each contribute to your turnover?

We hold the specialised niche of vectorial-data extraction from aerial, satellite and non-conventional geospatial imagery. DVP Aerotriangulation provides the user with an effective AT point-measurement and block-orientation system. OrthoMosaic includes all the tools required for efficient orthophoto production. Over the last two years we have completely reengineered our technology and have launched successful new products. One, which has been well received by our clients, is Vectorization version 6. It has been most appreciated for its capacity to deal with the realities of producing geospatial data. Another new software package is Image Batch Processing, that allows for processing groups of images at the same time. It supports conventional aerial-photo image formats, formats from new digital sensor technology, and satellite imagery.

Who are your main clients and how is your custom-base distributed over the continents?

We service clients in more than eighty countries and our software is used in numerous public institutions and national mapping agencies, among which many with international recognition. We are also successful with education institutions because they appreciate the user-friendliness combined with rigour and transparency qualities of our products. Our data-extraction software is our star product. It contributes to 70% of our sales. It is easily integrated into existing production lines.

How is your (inter)national distribution network organised, including your after-sales services?

I would define our distribution network as being at the same time classic and flexible. It is comprised of specialised distributors and agents active in the geospatial field. We have about thirty distributors. Our distribution agreements framework takes into account our partners' markets and technical expertise. To some we offer more commercial support while they take care of customer services, while for others we fully take on the technical services aspect. Whatever agreement we have with our local representative, the collaboration is transparent, so as to better serve our customers. Therefore we guarantee our customers a response from our technical support team within 24 hours, by telephone or email. We have always been recognised for the quality and resourcefulness of our technical services and we aim at keeping this trademark. We are conscious of our customers' constraints: the data production and its associated stressful situation, we know about!

You not only develop software but also use it for your own production needs, so that you compete with your own customers. Is that not a vulnerable business model?

Not at all! Not in today's business world of globalisation and where the industry is comprised of big and small players in very specialised technologies and/or services. Our expertise and challenges at service level benefit from the progress of our technologies, which become accessible to the community, and the reverse is also true. Furthermore, in the geospatial business, the 'co-petitor' notion is very present. We are competitors one day and partners the next day.

From a business perspective the last decade may be characterised as the era of the takeover. You are a relatively small firm. How did you succeed in staying independent?

We went with the trend! By associating itself with Groupe ALTA, DVP-GS brought to another level its combined-relation recipe for success: 'Production services/R&D and Software'. It is what enabled us to progress in the last eighteen years. By being part of a group of geomatic experts at Groupe ALTA we are able to tap in to new technologies, both in terms of acquisition and of integrated services. This enables us to experience the industry's mutation from the inside and not only as spectators.

How do you see the future of photo-grammetry in relation to the rapid developments going on in the GIS domain?

I see an extraordinary future for photogrammetry. On one side, Google and Virtual Earth are currently creating a never before seen interest and demand for geospatial data by the 'good enough' large public. On the other side, major manufacturers have developed very efficient captors and digital cameras that produce data of exceptional metric and radiometric quality: $1+1 = 2$. It is only a matter of time before we see a significant increase in the demand for quality data. [Photogrammetry](#) has definitely come out of the shadows (or the dark room!) and is active again.

What firms and market demands inspire you most in the design and development of your products?

What inspires us the most is to create high-performance, rigorous and user-friendly products, and that applies to any market. What inspire us the most are our customers and the challenges that they need to face every day in order to stay competitive in their respective fields. Our customers have recognised the quality of our products and have made DVP-GS a successful international supplier of geospatial-data extraction solutions.

Do you co-operate with universities and research institutes to improve and innovate when it comes to your products?

We have always collaborated with the Canadian universities, particularly with Laval University. Our software, moreover, comes from research carried out at Laval University during the 1980s. Our current collaborations aim, among other things, at improving the data-extraction technologies not only in terms of automation but also in terms of geospatial database integration. We are also collaborating with the Canadian Spatial Agency, the Canada Center for Remote Sensing, and Quebec's Natural Resources Ministry. From these collaborations originated our new product dedicated to satellite-imagery exploitation.

What technological developments do you expect in image-data capture and information extraction from imagery over the coming decade?

The efficient integration of new captors (digital cameras and Lidar captors) in the lines of production will, without a doubt, characterise the years to come. In addition to considerably modifying the problematic of workflow management, these captors improve process data quality, such as radiometry of images and reliability of Digital Surface Models (DSM). These improvements will have an important impact on the capture-automation process. Workflow management is a major stake, particularly since the advent of digitalisation. The use of network technologies is at the heart of this management and will increasingly support data and metadata sharing, but also their processes, such as Web process services, and resources.

Where do you want to be five years from now?

GIS systems are more and more user-friendly and completely integrated. CAD/DB/WEB is now the answer to every need, from the domain end-user to the workflow-data production expert. The data acquisition has become multi-source and the technologies implicated are increasingly sophisticated. Over the coming five years DVP-GS will continue to hold the niche of data extraction and will increase its interventions on many critical aspects of the production lines. Our expertise will enable us to expand our niche with new high-performance products associated with data-acquisition operations, planning and management, from aerial acquisition to the archiving of projects and data, all in complement to the GIS production platform. The last two years have been devoted to the complete re-architecture of our technologies in order to make this future come true.

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