

Q&A with Jean-Christophe Zufferey, senseFly



To gain real insight into today's geospatial business landscape, 'GIM International' decided to ask some of the sector's most influential companies for their opinions. This series of Q&As captures the current state of the industry from various perspectives, such as which technological and societal developments will have the most impact on the geomatics market, which market segments are the most promising and which areas offer the most substantial growth. The questions also explore the trend towards open data and open-source software. Here, Jean-Christophe Zufferey, CEO and co-founder of senseFly, expresses his views.

Which technological developments will affect your product/service portfolio the most in the coming years?

The development of drones for geospatial applications has made aerial imagery affordable and easy to obtain. As a result, data acquisition has been revolutionised and become much more efficient. Aside from further increasing the efficiency, coverage and accuracy of our products, new technologies like improved connectivity, machine learning and AI will allow us to improve data interpretation and analysis, and make processes like updating maps immediately actionable.

Which societal developments will influence your share of the geomatics market the most in the coming years? How and why?

As developers of new technology, we expect our share of the geomatics market to continue increasing in the coming years. This is driven by three trends. First, drones are becoming more and more common, driven by the widespread use of consumer drones, and therefore more widely accepted in commercial use cases. A lot of the scepticism that drone solutions were initially met with is now gone and adoption is rising drastically as efficiency increases and fast return on investment are widely proven. Second, developing economies are investing rapidly in new technologies. There, the younger population works in our favour, as the workforce is more eager to adopt new innovations like drone technology. Thirdly, airspace regulators worldwide are bringing more clarity into the use of drones, which alleviates a barrier that has often kept potential customers from adopting drones in professional use cases.

Which market segments are the most promising for your products/services?

senseFly solutions are well established in the geospatial, agriculture and inspection segments, and that is where we expect to see continued healthy growth. Geospatial applications are the largest market for our flagship product, the eBee Plus, where flight time, coverage, the centimetre-level precision RTK GPS and professional-grade sensors such as the senseFly S.O.D.A. make it unique. Our largest customers come from the mining and construction industries, as well as surveying companies and public institutions that use it for land management.

In which parts of the world do you envisage substantial growth in users of your products/services?

senseFly operates globally. We have more than 200 points of sale throughout the world and service centres across all regions. In the past, adoption was driven by the most developed economies, in particular North America and Europe, but we now see our penetration increasing across virtually all regions. That is why we opened an office in China as well as in the Asia-Pacific region last year and continue to grow our distribution network.

Open data is becoming increasingly available all over the world. How will this trend affect your business?

Open data is an enabler for the business we're in. senseFly solutions are built to provide highly precise geospatial data and 3D terrain models, which are becoming more and more relevant for many industries, including automotive, construction, transportation and mining, to name but a few. The availability of open data in the geospatial world accelerates the development of new solutions, and makes things like AI or autonomous navigation possible. Both the trend towards open data and the solutions it enables are creating a need for more high-accuracy data to be generated on demand in near real time, which

creates more demand for our solutions.

Will the tendency of increasing use of open-source software be a threat or an opportunity for your business?

Open-source software (OSS) has been in use for decades, and has played a major role in technological progress in three ways. First, it makes technology available to a broad audience and allows this audience to reuse it at virtually only the operating cost. This enables innovation, because rather than replicating what has already been developed, resources are spent building new web applications on top of the OSS. Second, just by being available, it is possible for companies to use and customise it, which creates value; we use a number of open-source tools and frameworks internally to boost our admin and R&D processes. Finally, open-source software sets the minimum standard in areas where commercial software is also available, and thus challenges the creators of commercial software to innovate and differentiate. So OSS is more than an opportunity; it is a business enabler.

About Jean-Christophe Zufferey

Jean-Christophe Zufferey is the CEO and co-founder of senseFly. He is a pioneer in the field of small, bio-inspired, autonomous flying robots, holding a PhD in mobile robotics from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) – where he has taught and managed numerous robotics projects – as well as an MSc in micro engineering, the thesis for which he completed at Carnegie Mellon University. A Swiss national, Jean-Christophe is also a licensed pilot with a passion for flying helicopters and fixed-wing aerobatics.

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