AN INTERVIEW WITH MLADEN STOJIC

WHAT IS IN A NAME? GEO:CONNEXION INVESTIGATES ERDAS, INC.

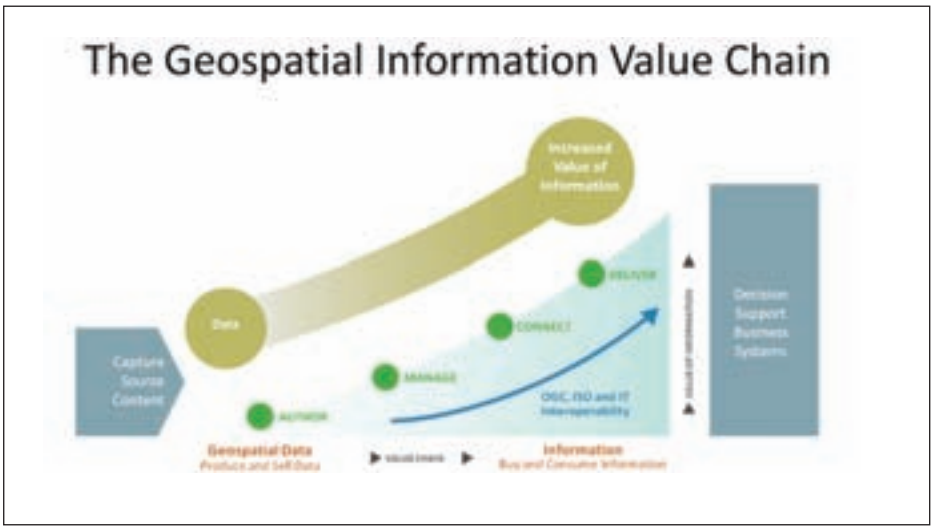
Mladen Stojic, Senior Vice President of Product Management and Marketing, ERDAS, Inc.

Geo:connexion International editor, Roger Longhorn, recently interviewed Mladen Stojic, Senior Vice President of Product Management and Marketing at ERDAS , Inc. on the implications of the 're-branding' of Leica Geosystems Geospatial Imaging.

GEO:connexion - Leica Geosystems Geospatial Imaging has integrated several acquisitions into the firm and renamed itself as ERDAS, Inc., the "The Earth to Business" Company. What does that mean in terms of the focus on ERDAS products and services?

Stojic: *To date, our customers exist within several departments of large enterprises. These customers have approached us to extend the utilization of geospatial content to the rest of their organizations. Our customers have made large investments in producing source content used to feed a variety of business systems. In order to increase their return on investment they continue to look for ways to extend and serve this data as on demand information products to support a diverse number of decision support systems.*

We, therefore translated our customers business problems into a strategy that would allow us to provide comprehensive Geospatial Business Systems, not only for producing source content, but also for maintaining, updating and delivering value added information products based on that source content. Understanding our customer's information value chain allows us to identify gaps in current products within our industry, while offering new innovative solutions based on highly scalable and interoperable geospatial business technologies.



The ERDAS view of the Geospatial Information Value Chain

As the new ERDAS, we harness the information of the changing earth for greater advantage. We provide a full spectrum of geospatial solutions, ensuring interoperability to meet both isolated needs, or to develop a complete Geospatial Business System for authoring, managing, connecting and delivering geospatial information.

GEO:connexion - Why ERDAS, Inc. as the new 'group' name?

Stojic: *ERDAS is a long established and well-known name, understood for its value throughout the geospatial software industry. In addition, the ERDAS name has credibility and recognition in both our existing and emerging markets, providing strong brand recognition as we extend our market reach. The ERDAS name also highlights our rich history in geospatial imaging as we continue to pioneer and lead the geospatial paradigm shift. ERDAS captures the innovation and flexibility of our company as we expand our offerings into the larger geospatial information markets.*

Leica Geosystems includes several other divisions, developing hardware components for measurement technology. As Leica Geosystems Geospatial Imaging, we were a unique piece of Leica Geosystems, specializing in software solutions. While we serve related industries, we have a different customer base. The other divisions of Leica Geosystems will continue operating under the Leica Geosystems name, while Leica Geosystems Geospatial Imaging will do business under the ERDAS name, moving forward.

GEO:connexion - Is the focus still primarily about earth imaging data where ERDAS has been a leader?

Stojic: *Our strategy has been extended to deliver solutions that provide our customers with Geospatial Business Systems for authoring, managing, connecting and delivering geospatial information (features, images, terrain, maps, spatial models and other location specific business information) to our customers. Geospatial imaging and photogrammetry provide a foundation for extending our reach into the market. We will continue to build geospatial imaging and photogrammetric solutions where we have always participated, especially in the defense arena and public sector. We will continue to have a very strong position in markets focused on producing geospatial data from a variety of sources. If you go to most public or private sector mapping organizations, they are using our remote sensing or photogrammetry products on the desktop to author maps, land cover datasets, spatial models, 3D scenes, ortho images, terrain datasets and feature databases. ERDAS has more than 60,000 licenses worldwide.*

Imaging solutions are an integral part of the authoring process. Geospatial authoring solutions enable users to utilize raw data captured from a variety of sources to produce data sets. Users may prepare this data to be used in numerous applications, increasing its versatility and the ability to derive additional information. With authoring solutions, users may perform a number of processes and analytics. For example, users may reference raw data to location, classify land cover, or develop a spatial model to compute change in an area. Authoring solutions transform source data into products.

GEO:connexion - What about other sectors of the overall geospatial information industry, for example mobile location based services, address-based 'location intelligence', etc.?

Stojic: *We will continue developing versatile data and application agnostic solutions. Additionally, our growing portfolio comprehen-*

sively addresses the vertically integrated solution/service market that has been evolving. We are building solutions integrated with industry databases, open standards and state of the art scalable client/server web-enabled and mobile platforms. We are leveraging our strengths, using existing products and expertise from across the companies recently brought into the group.

ERDAS ADE has the ability to handle Oracle 11g data. Previously a product of Acquis, ERDAS ADE contains web-based and mobile enterprise applications for editing Oracle Spatial data in both a connected and disconnected environment. Extending the value of Oracle, ERDAS ADE combines business information with geospatial content. ERDAS ADE now provides editing of user-defined data types, including Shapefiles (.shp). As well as being fully integrated with the Oracle Database and Application Server, the new version of ERDAS ADE also offers enhanced digitizing capabilities and support of Oracle MapViewer, a J2EE service for rendering maps managed by Oracle Spatial. MapViewer features supported by ERDAS ADE include the Linear Referencing System, GeoRaster and Workspace Manager. These enhancements provide ERDAS ADE with more comprehensive feature editing and data management capabilities. Efficiently handling spatial and non-spatial information, ERDAS ADE is further equipped for use in the field or office, using a mobile client, the web, desktop or laptop computer.

Recently, ERDAS also released a new version of Image Web Server (IWS), a solution acquired with ER Mapper. IWS is a high-speed, specialized server application that efficiently distributes large volumes of geospatial image data. IWS solves the infrastructure congestion problems associated with deploying large amounts of image data, empowering users to quickly access the information they need. IWS 8.5 provides online image processing of images, transforms and mosaics. This new technology allows the serving of different versions of the same image to desktop, web or server applications. These "virtual images" minimize the duplication of data across the enterprise, ensuring faster deployment of processed images. Users can now automatically receive scale dependent images from OGC compliant Web Mapping Services (WMS), specific to their view. The client application delivers the image for the scale needed, optimizing viewing performance for clients using the WMS protocol.

ERDAS Image Manager, a new product in our portfolio, integrating existing and acquired technologies, enables users and organizations to efficiently store and quickly share imagery throughout the enterprise. ERDAS Image Manager is a comprehensive OGC/ISO compliant solution that solves business problems associated with securely discovering, describing, cataloguing and serving imagery to a variety of web and rich client applications throughout an organization. Providing true interoperability, ERDAS Image Manager seamlessly connects to numerous geoweb applications and geospatial solutions, including ERDAS IMAGINE®, LPS and ArcGIS desktop products. ERDAS Image Manager is flexible, while ensuring a high level of security through administrator defined privileges. With ERDAS Image Manager, users may develop vertical market applications using an extensible web and rich client application framework. Implementing OGC standards (WMS, WCS and CS-W) and the ECW-P protocol, ERDAS Image Manager provides rapid delivery of unprecedented volumes of imagery to domain specific desktop and consumer web client applications.

ERDAS TITAN enables users to share, discover and consume data in an online, dynamic, collaborative network. Implementing an ERDAS TITAN GeoHub allows an organization or data provider to create their own secure community within the ERDAS TITAN Network. This enables data to be shared and published internally, with the option of exposing geospatial data holdings to other users and communities within the ERDAS TITAN Network as well.

GEO:connexion - With something like 15 listed products or services available from ERDAS Inc. across the four categories of business related functions, how difficult is it to keep up with evolution in the standards, interoperability specifications world?

Stojic: *This is a challenge and requires significant resources, but is considered very important to the business plan. We are now a Strategic member of the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC), and a member of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), actively participating in interoperability standards throughout our industry. In the OGC, Strategic Members provide significant resources to support OGC objectives in the form of funding for program initiatives and staff resources inserted into the OGC process. Our strong commitment to the OGC reflects our understanding of diverse clients' needs for standards-based geospatial data management and delivery solutions. Standards-based interoperability is a key requirement in solving complex problems that involve sharing spatial data and processing resources and managing the lifecycle of enterprise data. ERDAS brings image processing, spatial modelling, exploitation and sensor expertise to the larger industry community, collaborating with many partners to provide customers with comprehensive, multi-vendor, fully interoperable enterprise solutions.*

GEO:connexion - ERDAS already has advanced tools in products like ERDAS IMAGINE, ERM Pro, etc. In your opinion, what is still missing and where do you go next, product-wise, in the ERDAS software suite?

Stojic: *Over the course of the coming year, our customers will have the ability to extend and use spatial modeling throughout the enterprise. We will continue to increase performance and accuracy throughout the existing product range. We will also develop additional technology for incorporating geospatial data into existing business systems, empowering organizations to complete the value chain, transforming data into geospatial information. Given the enterprise technologies we have brought into the company, we now have a platform to build solutions that we sell to our customers who have specific vertical market needs. We have partners who will take our platform to build additional vertical market solutions.*

We have a strategy of enabling the use of our technology throughout an organization. We do not want to limit options by dictating whether a customer needs a mobile, Web or desktop client. The reason we chose our system architecture (J2EE) is that it allows us the flexibility and scalability to deploy our solutions on a Web browser, in a mobile client and in a rich desktop client or on a cluster of CPUs that are supporting a distributed processing factory.

We enable customers to deal with data from a variety of sources. We are agnostic when it comes to maintaining, updating and creating a fresh Geospatial Business System. We will continue to innovate, developing solutions that deliver geospatial information to all environments very rapidly.

GEO:connexion - What challenges do you see ahead, introducing a product range that was initially targeted at the desktop (individual user) environment into a full enterprise-wide system approach?

Stojic: *With the strength of our J2EE geospatial business platform, we have the ability to offer secure, scaleable, open and standards compliant geospatial offerings to our customers. The geospatial offerings that we currently provide with our desktop products can now be deployed within this new integrated geospatial business infrastructure. The challenges that need to be solved include common security across products, scalability to handle thousands of users within an organization, performance, interoperability with other business systems and quality. Because we already have a solid enterprise platform, the ability to extend the utilization of our desktop capabilities onto this platform is a reality.*

Photo credits: NASA (France) and ESA (Greece fires)