



GeoEye launches high-resolution satellite

Sat Sep 6, 2008

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - GeoEye Inc (GEOY.O: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) said it successfully launched into space on Saturday its new GeoEye-1 satellite, which will provide the U.S. government, Google (GOOG.O: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) Earth users and others the highest-resolution commercial color satellite imagery on the market.

“It was a picture-perfect launch and we’ve now gotten confirmation that ... we have commanded the satellite and it has responded,” GeoEye Chief Executive Matthew O’Connell told Reuters in a telephone interview from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, where the satellite was launched at 11:50 a.m. PDT (2:50 p.m. EDT).

“Everybody is now slapping high fives,” he said, adding that it would take 30 to 45 days before the company calibrates the camera aboard the satellite and receives imagery.

GeoEye-1 will be able to capture images at .41 meters (16 inches) resolution in black and white and 1.65 meters (5.5 feet) in color, but under current government rules, the company can only offer the public half-meter (1.64 feet) images.

The satellite will take digital images of the Earth from 423 miles and moving at a speed of about 4 1/2 miles per second.

O’Connell said the \$502 million satellite, built partly with money from the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, would “open up a lot of opportunities” for the GeoEye, and capped four years of work on the spacecraft.

On hand to watch Saturday’s launch of the satellite -- shot into space by a Delta II rocket emblazoned with Google’s logo among others -- were Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Google spokesman Brian O’Shaughnessy said.

GeoEye’s other satellites provide images to Google, Microsoft and Yahoo, but Google will be its only online-search mapping customer.

O’Shaughnessy said Page and Brin “look forward to getting some real quality, high-resolution imagery into Google Earth in the months to come.”

He said the new color imagery would mean that Google Earth and Google Maps users would have access to more detailed images in about three to four months, after the new imagery had been loaded into Google.

GeoEye's main rival, Digital Globe, which plans an initial public offering this year, launched its new high-resolution satellite, WorldView-1, in late 2007. It offers half-meter resolution in black and white.

GeoEye-1 was built by a unit of General Dynamics (GD.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) and its imaging system was built by ITT Corp (ITT.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)). The 4,310-pound satellite was launched by United Launch Alliance, a joint venture of Lockheed Martin Corp (LMT.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) and Boeing (BA.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)).