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Effective Leadership Needed

Hosted Payload Adoption Showing Promising Signs, Say Executives

Hosted payloads, where commercial satellites carry other payloads in addition to the primary payload, may not be fully developed, but there are encouraging signs that the practice will become increasingly popular, said satellite industry executives. CEO Matt Desch of Iridium, whose coming 81-satellite IridiumNEXT constellation includes a large chunk of reserved space for hosted payloads, voiced recently some disappointment with how slow adoption has been (CD Jan 20 p6). The variance in opinions may be due in part to the difference between geostationary and low-earth orbit offerings, said an executive.

While there's been some slowness by the government, the marketing pitch has improved and budget constraints help make the case for hosted payloads, executives said. "We are seeing some very hopeful signs in leadership in the U.S. government on hosted payloads," said Don Brown, vice president of hosted payloads at Intelsat General. For instance, the addition of a hosted payload office within the U.S. Space and Missile Systems Center (SMC) is encouraging, he said. "Those signs have to be followed up with action, but it's clear that hosted payloads are very much a part of the dialog now with the U.S. government on how to affordably address space missions."

"We wish that things were moving faster, certainly," said Brown. Companies now though can point to some experience in trying to sell space on satellites, he said. The biggest examples so far are the Commercially Hosted Infrared Payload (CHIRP) now on the SES-2 satellite and Intelsat-22, scheduled for launch this year carrying a payload for the Australian Defence Force. "Before we were talking about concepts and demonstrations, now we're talking about fundamental missions," Brown said.

SES Government Solutions said its situation may be somewhat different than Iridium's. "It's possible you will find we have a different perspective on the subject with our experience with the CHIRP program, as well as two other payloads SES has on contract for the European Commission," said a spokeswoman. "We've been encouraged by the innovation and leadership we've seen within" the Defense Department, she said.

The launch of CHIRP on SES-2 "serves as a trailblazer for future hosted payloads and innovative space solutions," said retired U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Peter Hoene, SES Government Solutions vice president of development. "This approach and the operational capabilities it can provide will be especially important as the DoD enters an austere budgetary environment over the next few years." Government moves toward increasing hosted payload use "will pay dividends for the US Government as they pursue more resilient, affordable, and adaptable space capabilities," he said by email. Space Systems/

Loral agreed that the interest seems to be there. SMC has asked for input on "electro-optical and infrared sensors that can be hosted on commercial spacecraft to support the space situational awareness and missile warning mission areas," said David Anhalt, Space Systems/Loral vice president. "Many in the commercial industry base — [including] Space Systems/Loral — have been funded by the Air Force to study hosted options for military satellite communication."

There may be important differences involved in selling hosted payload space on a single geostationary orbit satellite versus a low-earth orbit constellation such as Iridium's, said a satellite industry lawyer. Such a constellation with a large number of interconnected satellites may make sense for very specific applications, but it would likely require increased complexity and coordination, said the lawyer. Intelsat's Brown was less certain of the impact of different satellite types. "I think, frankly, the macro affects us both," he said: "The macro is the fact that you need really effective leadership to make change and you have to reflect that change in the budget cycle," something that requires long-term planning. — **Tim Warren**