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No longer at sea

OSI Geospatial charts a smoother course by taking maritime tech to the shore

Matt Hartley, National Post

One of the reasons cities bid so frantically to host the Olympics is the leftover venues, buildings and other infrastructure that must be bought and built before the Games, but which keep being useful long after the athletes have all gone home. The Games also sometimes give homegrown companies a chance to show off their wares.

Take Ottawa's OSI Geospatial Inc. The company's ECPINS technology (Electronic Chart Precision Integration Navigation System) was installed on the shores of British Columbia by the Canadian Navy to help it patrol the ports and harbours around Vancouver during the Olympics. By all accounts, it was a successful showcase of the company's new land-based charting technology.

Until recently, ECPINS was primarily used on warships and nuclear submarines. The company supplies its electronic mapping technology fleet-wide to the navies of Canada, The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Portugal and the Netherlands, signing contracts worth between \$1 million and \$3 million. The military contractor's technology is installed on the bridge of the ship, but it can also collect information from other systems, including radar and global positioning systems, so that navigation teams have more data at their disposal from a single terminal.

But by developing new charting technologies for land-based command centres and port security vessels, its potential market has grown exponentially and contracts are expected to be in the range of \$5 million to \$15 million. "The addressable market is fivefold of what the ship-based market is," says OSI Geospatial CEO Ken Kirkpatrick, "simply because of the number of vessels that support coastal and port-security activities."

In the first quarter of 2010, OSI Geospatial reported that it inked more than \$3.8 million worth of new contracts while completing a US\$6.5-million intellectual property sale to the U.S. government. That's good news for a firm that saw annual revenues dip 14% last year and with shares (TSX: OSI) that have been in decline in recent years. The sailing ahead appears much smoother.

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