



Spot Image is embarking on Planet Action, an original initiative to tackle the serious threats posed by global warming. The company intends to support projects focusing on climate issues, in particular by providing imagery. Hervé Buchwalter explains the rationale behind this corporate citizenship initiative.

Interview

**HERVÉ BUCHWALTER,
SPOT IMAGE CHAIRMAN & CEO**

“FOR SPOT IMAGE, PLANET ACTION IS ABOUT BEING A GOOD CORPORATE CITIZEN”

Spot Image is launching an ambitious project dubbed Planet Action. Can you tell us more about it?

First of all, let's recall the context of this initiative. Human impacts on climate change are no longer in doubt. Scientists, industry, governments and concerned citizens have grasped the fact that it is now urgent to act, both locally and globally. We need reliable measurements and data to establish the “ground truth” and support actions. Satellite imagery is a useful aid in this respect. With a global archive of more than 20 years of imagery, three operational satellites, partner operators around the globe and a unique worldwide network of receiving stations, Spot Image is ideally placed to provide this kind of information. Our archive

gives us a historical, synoptic perspective of the planet and a wealth of images at more local scales. We therefore decided to launch Planet Action to support projects geared toward combating climate change, especially those requiring satellite Earth imagery. Every year, Spot Image and partners engaging in Planet Action will contribute to projects by providing imagery, funding, expertise and other kinds of support.

This initiative marks a clear departure from your usual programmes and projects.

Yes, it does. Through Planet Action, Spot Image is not seeking to win customers or earn revenues. Our sole motivation is the valuable contribution we can make as an industry player. We must look beyond our usual mission and consider our own social responsibility. Spot Image cannot just sit back and watch the planet with no concern for the major challenges facing it. The nature of our business means that we can and must engage in this kind of corporate citizenship initiative.

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PLANET ACTION

Spot the impacts, engage in action

>>> **What exact role do you expect Spot Image to play in Planet Action?**

We want to set the project in motion, but we can't go it alone. Our ultimate objective is to set up a foundation to ring-fence this initiative from our business. In concrete terms, Planet Action must be driven forward by project partners—NGOs, industry and institutions—concerned by climate change. Through Planet Action, we are looking to connect global approaches and local initiatives more closely.

What partnerships have you formed for the project so far?

We have decided to work with the foundation created by Timothy W. Foresman, an American scientist renowned internationally for his efforts in the field of sustainable development. He has worked at NASA and for the United Nations, and has been active defending environmental causes for many years. The International Center for Remote Sensing Education, created with academia and environmental experts, focuses chiefly on education and training. It is already pursuing major outreach actions and responded very positively to our project. This foundation will help us to broaden our partnerships, explore new avenues and raise funds. We are also in discussions with partners like CNES, ESA, Infoterra, ESRI, UNESCO, NGOs, the media, NSPO¹ and receiving stations. We have already held several meetings, the idea is gaining momentum and we have partners who are ready to commit to it.

1) National Space Organisation, Taiwan

Have you identified themes to work on?

Yes, we've selected five themes that will underpin Planet Action projects: human issues and coping strategies; water resources, drought and desertification; vegetation, biodiversity and ecosystems; oceans; and lastly, ice and snow cover. Candidate projects must focus on one of these themes. We intend to select 15 to 20 during the kick-off phase.

What selection criteria will you apply?

We are going to establish a charter specifying the criteria that projects must meet to qualify. We will be attaching a lot of importance to the scientific value of projects, which must link scientists in academia with teams working in the field. In 2008, we will issue an international call for projects that will be evaluated by the foundation.

Do you have any projects in mind yet?

Yes, we had planned for 15 projects during the first year. Today, we have already identified half of the projects for which we intend to supply imagery. These include a project by Pro-Natura International, a French NGO, in the forests of Côte d'Ivoire and another with Graines d'îles, a non-profit association, with whom we are involved in a programme focusing on invasive plant species in Madagascar. We are also going to provide imagery for two more very interesting actions, one concerning coral bleaching in the Caribbean and another on changing land use and land cover in southern Europe.

Do you see Planet Action achieving international success?

We definitely feel this initiative has a broad appeal. We shall see. We would like to set up a Web portal to deliver data, imagery and visualization tools to anyone who wants them. We hope in this way to help enhance knowledge and build up a corpus of analytical data. We would also like to develop education and outreach actions, particularly towards schools.

Will there be funding issues?

Some projects will request funding. The foundation's task will be to raise funds to back them. That's why we feel it's important to get the message across to a wide audience. But I must emphasize again that we don't view this as a commercial initiative.

But an initiative like this is bound to benefit Spot Image's business, isn't it?

Yes, we suppose so. It will benefit our corporate image. Through Planet Action, Spot Image is affirming its credentials as a socially responsible, global corporate citizen. But besides boosting our image, Planet Action symbolizes the need to take a wider view of where our business sector is headed. I also think it will help to strengthen our partnership ties. Some projects are going to raise partners' profiles in the eyes of their national authorities.

How do you intend to promote Planet Action?

In addition to the usual communication actions like attending exhibitions and conferences, or announcements in the press, we are counting on the Web portal to keep people informed about projects. We're also going to organize an annual prizegiving event with partners. We plan to hold the first one in France next year. ■

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■ www.planet-action.org