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Geosemble Combines Satellite Views With Data Resources

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Thanks to Google Maps you can zoom onto a satellite image of just about any office building anywhere in the world. But what if you could also get the name of the companies in the building, their financial reports, their executive shuffles and mergers and acquisitions?

El Segundo-based Geosemble Technologies Inc., a 3-year-old spinoff from USC Viterbi School of Engineering, has developed technology that can do just that. It automatically extracts satellite and aerial images of roads, parcels, and structures available through the U.S. Geological Survey and fuses the images with available online information about them.

Ten engineers have nurtured the baby technology since its inception in a USC classroom in 2000. Within a year of incorporating, the company landed a contract with the Department of Homeland Security. In recent months, the company has received grants from the National Science Foundation, Defense Advanced Projects Agency, and the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

Geosemble President Andre Doumitt said the grants total in the millions of dollars, and funding is likely to increase by at least five times in the next five years.

The National Science Foundation, for example, is funding the technology to sell to businesses that manufacture backyard equipment and outdoor leisure furniture. The company's GeoPrism system can analyze satellite images and automatically identify homes with big backyards. That data can be cross-referenced to a list of homeowners with interests in gardening and golf, or those who may have a home office. All this is based on information already available online.

"It allows for targeted marketing campaigns by linking consumer interests with manufacturing capabilities," Doumitt said.

Companies that sell solar energy could also benefit from this technology, as Geosemble can identify homes that would benefit from green power based upon their elevation and the amount of sun and wind on site.

Does this evoke privacy concerns of marketers lurking in people's backyard via satellite spying?

"The amount of satellite imagery available, just on Google, is simply public information," Doumitt said. "It's a part of the evolution of technology and open source data. It could bring benefit to people by reducing senseless junk-mail because marketers know exactly who they're marketing to."