



● ● John Ratigan, President of iDirect Government

iDirect Government was formed in 2007 primarily as a product organisation. The company produces a broad range of line cards, satellite routers, network management software and hubs, and deals exclusively with the US Government and its civilian agencies.

It's been a big year for iDirect Government; the company has brought out its first new products in many years, all complete with state-of-the-art technology, to replace its nine-year old predecessor products. Addressing the growing complexity of deploying and managing global IP networks, iDirect Government's new equipment is expected to provide the most bandwidth-efficient, scalable and secure capabilities, making all the difference for government and military operations at home and abroad.

iDirect Government has previously found maintaining growth a big challenge due to its older products, and is now looking forward to several years of strong growth with its new lines and diversification into new market areas.

# GMC

## Q&A

## Solid growth and enhancing focus ●●

iDirect Government was formed under VT iDirect in 2007 to provide satellite products exclusively to the US government. Hubs, satellite routers, line cards and network management software are amongst its product offerings, and the company's portfolio is growing at an impressive pace. Amy Saunders met with John Ratigan, President of iDirect Government, to talk about the government communications market.

**GMC: The government communications sector has experienced an interesting time in the last few years with a great deal of change. What's your assessment on recent developments?**

**John Ratigan:** For us, it's really good: We had a great year last year. Every year, we're always worried about the national budget and the defence budget, but that all seems to be working out. The communities and the people we work with are all going to get their funding, and we're hoping that will, in turn, help our bottom line.

**GMC: When we last spoke in 2017, iDirect Government had just launched a new collection of products, its first in eight or nine years. Can you give us an overview of those products, and how they've been received by clients?**

**John Ratigan:** We're excited that we finally have new technology to refresh all the things that have been out there for so long. We have an 8-Series of products that has been out there since February 2008 – it's been 10 years! We're finally able to sell some new equipment.

It's been very slow with our new products, because when we first brought them out, the hardware was ready, but the software wasn't. That software is finally coming out now, so while sales started back in the Autumn, they're really picking up now and we're selling more. We expect to have some great sales coming from all the work we've done over the last four years.

**GMC: In the interest of growth, it's vital to continue to develop new products in line with market expectations. Which areas will you be looking into next?**

**John Ratigan:** We're not going to wait so long until the next series of products comes out. We're already working on the next generation; it'll be three or four years before we're product ready. We'll be approaching our customer base to find out what they need, and we'll try to find the biggest intersection of what everybody needs, and that's what we'll build. We'll probably be looking at special capabilities, maybe something for rotor wing capabilities, and probably some anti-jam capabilities built into the modem. We'll also be looking at new and enhanced waveforms.



● ● Photo courtesy of Pexels

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We're going to look at different platforms. Technology progresses so rapidly that there are already newer, cooler things we could do if we developed another platform. We're in the process of looking at that right now, as well as developing new hardware products.

We'd like to make it easier for the government to transition to a new platform, so we'll probably build our new products on the Evolution platform with the ability to transition onto a new platform. It'll take us two or three years to develop a new platform, and of course by that time there will be other new things out as well.

**GMC: Maintaining growth has been a particular challenge for iDirect Government for some years now, as we've discussed before. Has that changed with the new product line?**

**John Ratigan:** In 2016 we grew a little bit, but I didn't think we were going to grow last year because, even though we had the new products, we didn't have the new software ready. But we actually grew about 10 percent. We think we'll grow another 10 percent this year as well. I expect the next three years to be really good for us.

**GMC: The NewSpace sector is really growing up a storm – you can't read a mainstream newspaper anymore without reading at least one article on the topic. Are there any new areas you might be looking into in the future?**

**John Ratigan:** The big thing is high throughput satellite (HTS). The world has gone crazy with bandwidth; there's enough bandwidth in space now for all of us to have our own 100Mbps channel walking around the Earth. We're trying to do everything we can to accommodate what we call the multi-orbital plane. Traditionally in satellite, we've worked at the geostationary level, but now we've got medium Earth orbit (MEO) and a lot of low Earth orbit (LEO). While the LEO constellations aren't up and operational yet, we're doing a lot of research and planning some things into our newer technology that will accommodate those as well.

We always try to be agnostic in terms of satellites. I always define us as the sister router of satellite modems, in that we don't care what you do with it, just as long as you use it. We'll build in as many things as we can into the device so that it can be as flexible as possible. Our products will operate on the Evolution software, which has been our traditional base-level software, as well as our Velocity software. We try to make it easier for the customer.

**GMC: We're hearing increasing chatter about the next big bands, Q and V-band. What's your take on using higher bands for satellite communications?**

**John Ratigan:** I don't know if we need it right now. Historically, we just keep going up in frequency, and I know the US government has done some things in Q-band, but it won't make a difference to us. Signals come out of the back of our modems in L-band and use a BUC to go to whatever frequency the client wants. Do I think we'll be seeing more of these higher bands in the years to come? Yes; if there's some advantage to going there, I think it'll happen. Typically, the big disadvantage we always see by moving to higher frequencies is that more things can affect the signal like rain and atmospheric, but I think it'll happen eventually anyway.

**GMC: Every company has its own unique challenges. What are the biggest challenges you're facing right now?**

**John Ratigan:** One of the biggest challenges is always: How do we get things done in the timeframe we want to get them done in? We're trying to serve the world, and in doing that, we're trying to do too many things at the same time, trying to make everybody happy. On the iDirect Government side, we're going to expand our internal engineering teams so that we can focus a greater amount of resources on the US government. I think that's going to benefit us tremendously.

**GMC: In 2017, iDirect Government celebrated 10 years of operations. What are your expectations for the next 10 years?**

**John Ratigan:** I'm thinking about next month, and you're asking about 10 years! We expect to continue to grow our company, and we've been challenged by the ownership to do that. We want to continue to expand our presence with the US government; we're not necessarily that big, but we're really good at what we do and very focused. We'd like to expand upon what we're already doing, with more products and potentially services as well. I feel 10 percent growth per year would be good, we wouldn't be unhappy with that, so we're looking at a variety of different avenues to achieve that. In 10 years, I would expect us to be at least twice the size that we are now; twice the revenue, twice the profit, and a much bigger product line. We'll probably manifest ourselves differently in 10 years, especially with everything moving to the cloud. We may be operating very small devices that have to be attached to the Internet in some way, and I suspect we'll do more with smaller products, UASs, etc. There's a lot of different things we'd like to pursue. **GMC**



● ● Photo courtesy of iDirect Government

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- **Pascal Legai**, Director-General, **European Union Satellite Centre**
- **Captain David Moody**, Deputy Head of Space, HQ Joint Forces Command, **Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom**
- **Dr. Christina Giannopapa**, Acting Head of the Political Affairs Office, **European Space Agency (ESA)**
- **Dr. Gregory Edwards**, Director Infrastructure Services, **NATO Communications and Information Agency**
- **Lieutenant General (Ret) Henry de Roquefeuil**, Military Advisor, **Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES), France**
- **Johan Kohler**, Head of Solar System Science, **Swedish National Space Board**
- **Martin Coleman**, Executive Director, **Satellite IRG**
- **Squadron Leader (ret) Chris, Dunn**, Space Training and Education Consultant, **Defence Consultancy, United Kingdom**
- **Naomi McGill**, Researcher, **King's College London, United Kingdom**

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