

AOC - 80 years on, and still taking Geospatial Information to new heights



Until less than a century ago, quick and safe topographical surveys were not something infrastructure, mining or industrial developers could take for granted. Africa was a new frontier but required essential mapping for development. The only way was with lengthy ground surveys, often under difficult circumstances. Besides the time consuming nature of this approach, and the large distances to be covered on the ground, these surveyors often faced additional dangers, like wild animals.

The advent of aerial surveys made these problems a thing of the past. AOC was quick to capitalise on the benefits aircraft could bring to the provision of essential aerial photography.

You're invited to celebrate AOC's 80th birthday with the company, and enjoy this quick, retrospective look at AOC's current successes and into the future.

Market Leading Technologies

AOC makes use of a wide range of technologies to meet the Geospatial Information needs of many professional disciplines, such as engineering and planning, resources such as mining and forestry, and other consumers of digital content.

Today AOC provides products and services sourced from a multitude of airborne, groundborne and spaceborne sensors. The primary source is still airborne sensing using twin engine aircraft, modern digital cameras and specialised laser distance measurement in the form of airborne LiDAR sensing.

Apart from traditional aerial surveys, AOC provides satellite imagery, digital mapping, 3D city and mine modelling, photogrammetry and the revolutionary PICTOMETRY® 5 camera oblique imaging system. These varied solutions mean the company's services are highly sought after by clients operating in the mining, engineering, agriculture, forestry, energy, municipal and commercial arenas.

In addition to project-driven demands, AOC has amassed a vast quantity of oblique and vertical imagery that covers most of the South African metropolitan areas. This library is available to users requiring ad-hoc access to valuable geospatial content. Professionals in the urban property markets, typically those assisting in property valuations and the real estate market, find this resource invaluable.

A Bright New Partnership

In keeping with a proud 80-year aerial tradition, AOC is growing the business in the African market thanks to its key shareholder, AAM. AOC became a member of the international AAM Group in 2007, broadening both AOC's scope of services and sphere of operations. AAM is a 50-year old company with a strong footprint across Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia.

Seeking to break into Africa, AAM chose to pursue a company that had a well-established presence and experience on the continent - something that led it directly to AOC's door. The fact that it chose to seek out AOC was particularly serendipitous, as AOC had realised that, to survive and compete in an increasingly global marketplace, significant investment was needed in new technologies, resources and expertise - which was exactly what AAM offered.

With AAM as a shareholder, AOC not only obtains first access to all leading edge spatial technologies, but can also draw on vast expertise with regard to large projects, remote locations and challenging technical requirements.

A Brief History

AOC was founded in 1931, and began life equipped with aircraft considered modern at the time - notably Puss Moths and Glosters - while the surveying itself was performed with Eagle cameras, at that time considered top of the range photographic equipment. By 1934, the company was setting records - becoming involved in the first air service in Bechuanaland (later Botswana) and providing the first such flight to Maun.

When the Second World War began, AOC was taken over by the South African Air Force, serving as a reconnaissance unit that eventually became 60 Squadron. Following the cessation of hostilities in 1945, AOC became a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Huntings Group in the UK until 1978, when AOC was taken over in a management buyout. Since that time, and up until AAM became a majority shareholder in 2008, the company remained a privately-owned South African company.

In the 20 years leading up to the new millennium, AOC experienced major technology advances, being the first in Africa to produce digital orthophotos and to migrate to colour digital orthophoto map production. During this time, AOC conducted airborne topographical and geophysical surveys in countries as far afield as Tanzania, Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Ghana, Canada, Brazil and India.

Embracing Empowerment

AOC may be 80 years old as a business, but it's not 80 years old in its thinking. AOC places an emphasis on employing black entrants and graduates in the geospatial sciences, with the goal of increasing the diversity of those employed in this niche sector.

In addition, AOC's other major shareholder is TsaRona Investments, a leading black, women owned, investment company. This helps AOC meet high standards in respect of both equality and diversity.

Looking Ahead

The future is especially bright for AOC, as it continues to harness advanced technologies to deliver timely, reliable and cost effective geospatial information. Among the technologies being leveraged are:

- Airborne LiDAR for accurate terrain modelling and contours
- Large and medium format, aerial digital imaging
- PICTOMETRY® Oblique Imaging for detailed visualisation of urban areas
- High resolution satellite imagery
- Terrestrial and Mobile Laser scanning
- SiteSee Spherical Imaging
- GIS and web applications for easy geospatial information consumption

By providing essential geospatial information required for the ever-increasing resources, mining, energy and urban development requirements both in SA and across the African continent, AOC remains at the forefront of this specialist industry.

But the company has even bigger plans. Its vision is to be a globally competitive, Africa-focused, leading-edge, geospatial information company. Growth is part of AOC's long term strategy to be the continental leader in the geo-spatial information market. But most importantly, its sights remain focused on ensuring that it continues to contribute to the sustainable development of Africa by providing the essential geospatial information required for development.