

Kucera International: Still Flying High After All These Years



Kucera International's fleet of twin engine aircrafts.

As much as any industry, aerial photography is one market that has truly taken flight in the last dozen years. According to most industry observers, the demand for updated aerial imaging and mapping, particularly for municipal and regional requirements, has never been greater. Kucera International, founded in 1953 by Robert Kucera, was already a leader in the field when things started hopping a decade or so ago. And today the company is one of the biggest and best in the business—as well as Agfa's largest aerial customer.

"It's a unique combination of experience, stability, commitment to core and new capabilities, investment in technology, a dedication to high quality and cost effectiveness, and powerful customer relations that have helped us maintain our strong position," says John Antalovich, Sr., chief executive officer of the Willoughby, Ohio-based firm.

Such a substantial combination of elements doesn't just happen on its own; it's built over time by a group of dedi-

cated, talented professionals who know that their specialized skills are needed, valued and rewarded with the consistent growth of business. That's the way it was in the old days, and that's the way it is today. "We have continued to improve and expand our services for all of our clients, and we have experienced an increase in volume work from them, as well," Antalovich proudly states.

Customer satisfaction at Kucera is attributed to its highly capable staff working in close cooperation with carefully selected product and technology partners like Agfa.

Kucera International provides comprehensive aerial mapping and other geomatic services through conventional aerial photography, orthophotography, remote sensing, LiDAR, airborne surveying, digital terrain modeling, metadata generation and more. The company's services are in demand by dozens of local and state organizations, such as the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, for which Kucera provides color

aerial photography and terrain modeling of the entire Ohio shoreline of Lake Erie. Kucera also performs color aerial photography and digital orthophotography of a 1,200 square mile area in Hillsborough County, Florida.

Other clients include the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, NASA and other national agencies. Kucera has performed work in over 40 states and several countries. And Agfa has been a part of its success story for more than a decade.

"We had been using Agfa aerial film products on a limited basis until the mid-1990s, at which time we shifted to a predominant use of Agfa products," Antalovich says. "Agfa's customer and technical support, and the quality and consistency of their products, are what initially attracted us—and it has remained strong while competing film manufacturers have waned in those areas."

Antalovich also points to the incentives Agfa makes available for high-volume customers like Kucera as another factor in the strong ongoing relationship.

Kucera was one of the first aerial firms to select Agfa's Grand Sherpa wide format printer to produce color aerial enlargements for customers—which is another value-added service that sets the company apart from its competition. These enlargements are commonly made for clients' promotional or presentation purposes.

"We wanted to be able to produce these images in-house from digital imag-

ery without an investment in a cost prohibitive laser scan/film writer system that would still require photographic film processing,” Antalovich says. “The :Grand Sherpa fits our needs perfectly, and we have already produced thousands of color photos for our clients.”

Agfa’s :AperTune image enhancement software was also of particular interest to Kucera because of how it improves both production efficiency and end-product quality. “It provides automated tone/radiometric adjustment and anomaly removal to individualized scanned photo exposures directly following film scanning,” Antalovich explains, “and now we are using it with virtually all our film imagery projects.” The company is also testing :AperTune for use on digital imagery.

Meeting and exceeding customer needs and expectations has been a Kucera strength from the beginning, when the original Robert Kucera & Associates op-

erated from an airport in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. Back then its customers were mostly industrial. In the mid-1970s the company was awarded its first countywide mapping project for Oneida County, New York. In the 1980s its workload continued to concentrate on city and county mapping; in 1981 the company was awarded the contract to aeri ally map a 50-county area for the Missouri State Tax Commission’s state-wide reappraisal program.

In the early 1990s Kucera moved to its current, state-of-the-art, 18,000-foot headquarters facility near Lost Nation Airport in Willoughby. With its own aircraft, the latest global positioning technology, satellite offices in a half dozen other cities, 90 employees, the best quality certification programs, and the continued product collaboration with suppliers like Agfa, there is no task, goal or challenge that Kucera International can’t handle with ease and confidence. Just like in the old days.

FILM PROCESSING UPDATE:

Those companies extensively involved with PSU or NAIP photography should note the growing demand that Agfa has been tracking for the processing of our :Aviphot Chrome 200 film. Kevin Johnson of Aerial Photo Lab, Inc., Daytona, Florida, reports that he now has three E6-type machines on line using Agfa’s ASP 44 chemistry to process chrome reversal films.

Kevin says he will be adding an additional machine soon, bringing the number of processors on line to four to meet the heavy demand. There is no longer any reason to wait to switch to Agfa’s :Aviphot Chrome 200 film for PSU, NAIP or any other aerial imaging need that requires high speed and optimal color, which this film provides.

For additional information, please contact Kevin Johnson at 386-253-5041.



An aerial view of Iowa University.



Q&A with John Brandes



Agfa's John Brandes

Q: What effect is the growth of digital aerial camera sales having on Agfa's plans for the future of aerial films?

A: Sales of digital aerial cameras have indeed grown, but so have our sales of aerial film. In fact, our aerial film sales for the first five months of this year are above those for the same time period last year. So our plans for the continued support of aerial films, copy films, papers and chemistry remain in place. Discussions among our aerial customers and their end-users indicate that many companies do not consider digital aerial imaging a fully evolved technology, and that in many situations it simply does not adequately meet their needs.

As I have said many times in the past, industrial digital imaging technology is still evolving when compared to consumer digital imaging; no one can assume what was popular and successful in the consumer world will work as well in the industrial market. Industrial imaging puts additional and often rigorous demands on any technology. Many of our customers have informed us that clients have come back to them requesting projects be re-flown and re-shot on film, after first being digitally imaged. This indicates an ongoing fluctuation in attitude on the part of many aerial photography users, and while this is likely to change in time as the technology continues to evolve, we are confident in our decision to maintain a position in support of film technology for many years to come.

Agfa is also providing a viable bridge between analog imaging and digital workflow through the introduction of our :AperTune image enhancement software. Both interest and sales have been strong since its introduction at the end of last year. Our sales team was fully occupied during the recent ASPRS show in Reno, providing back-to-back demonstrations of the software. Response was very enthusiastic and customer feedback continues to be positive. As a supportive analog-to-digital link in image production, :AperTune provides an alternative to purchasing a digital camera for aerial companies not ready to do so. With it, a digital product can be delivered regardless of the initial method used for image capture.

Certainly, digital aerial imaging has its place, but it also has its limitations. As the technology unfolds, Agfa intends to support the market with both analog and digital solutions for the continued growth of all its aerial customers.

SPECIAL NOTE:

Please remember to sign up for Agfa's Aerial Imaging Seminar, to be held at Agfa headquarters in Mortsels, Belgium on September 11-14, 2006.

Immediately after the seminar, take advantage of the joint schedule we have with Leica Geosystems for the Leica Factory and Swiss tour, departing from Antwerp on September 15 for the trip to Heerbrugg. It will certainly be a memorable event.

Please contact your Agfa Aerial Sales Representative for additional information.