

5 Questions to Fabien Napolitano, iXblue



Fabien Napolitano joined iXblue in 2000 when the company was founded. His initial task was to develop iXblue's first inertial navigation systems. He was then successively head of the acoustic activity, head of the inertial navigation activity and CTO. Since June 2017 Mr Napolitano has been the company's chief operating officer. Read his answers to five questions about the hydrographic market.

Technology and societal needs are changing rapidly. How is your company adapting to these changes?

iXblue has gone through tremendous changes since its inception in 2000. We have always sought to adapt to the changing needs of our customers by developing new products and technologies. We have learnt to understand the applications of our customers better and we have explored many new markets.

What we have learnt from our experience is that the most decisive factor to be able to change and stay ahead is the human being. Beyond our technologies and products are the women and men who are passionate about what they do and about the work of our customers. It is thanks to their passion that we invent original solutions and explore new territories.

Because the human factor is an essential part of innovation, we are currently promoting and implementing an even more open, collaborative and agile culture at iXblue.

Which applications does your company focus its research and development activities on?

Our vision focuses on three key domains: the exploration of marine resources, the autonomy technologies and the photonic technologies. For every single one of those themes, we are seeking to develop new solutions by pushing the technologies to their limits and/or by combining complementary technologies that we master.

For 2018, we are actively working on new positioning systems combining acoustic and inertial technologies. We are also working on a new kind of sonar derived from the sonar we have developed a few years ago for industrial fishing. We cannot unveil too much yet but we are convinced that when they are released, those new products will open up new possibilities.

Our big news right now is the launch of DriX, our new Autonomous Unmanned Surface Vehicle designed specifically for hydrography and offshore survey. It encompasses almost everything we have worked for at iXblue over the past 15 years.

What is your company's growth strategy?

iXblue does not have a 'growth strategy', so to speak. For 15 years iXblue has grown by combining internal and external growth, seizing opportunities as they arise and patience. More than a 'growth strategy' we believe in some fundamentals such as the importance of human beings in the success of a company; the vertical integration of technologies to push performance to the limits and to offer unique features, and the cross-fertilisation between the 'market-driven' and the 'techno-push'.

How would you describe the hydrographic market these days?

Waiting for a change... for 15 years the price of equipment has gone down and the necessary skills needed are more widespread. However, the way hydrography is done today is not much different from the way it was done before. Besides the skills of hydrographers and oceanographers, hydrographic operations remain complex, costly and sometimes difficult in some areas.

Meanwhile in the car industry, a true revolution is underway and tends towards intelligent autonomous cars filled with sensors of very high performance at a very low cost. Following this trend there is a brand new vision to develop in the hydrographic industry, with the use of intelligent sensors and autonomy technologies becoming more accessible and widespread, driving a real change in the way we operate every single day. This is one of the reasons why we developed DriX, making for smarter sea operations.

What is your golden advice for doing business in hydrography and offshore surveying?

My golden advice is to build an open ecosystem. To make sea operations simpler, more cost-efficient and safer, there is a need for a growing number of diverse technologies and skills to merge.

I strongly believe that customers should be able to choose and use systems from competing companies in a seamless way, with each system being able to exchange data with the others.

At iXblue we believe that the successful companies will be those able to do 'coopetition'. Competing companies that will form partnerships

and that will develop open solutions allowing customers to choose and operate in the best conditions possible. It will then be up to each company to try to offer the best technology and service in order to succeed in this stimulating and productive environment.

<https://www.hydro-international.com/content/article/5-questions-to-fabien-napolitano-ixblue>
