

AUSTRALIAN SPACE STARTUP LAUNCHES TO THE WORLD

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Through a first-of-its-kind online marketplace for Earth observation data, Australian startup Arlula is making space more accessible for organisations around the globe

Right now there are more than 5,000 satellites orbiting our planet. Many of these are remote sensing spacecraft that observe the Earth through images and other data. Satellite operators launch and run these assets at huge expense, yet most are underutilised in a global industry worth around US\$6–7 billion.

‘Almost every country has an imaging satellite or a data collection satellite pointed at the Earth, but they’re not all being monetised,’ says Arlula co-founder and Chief Operating Officer, Arran Salerno.

At the same time, a growing number of businesses want access to Earth observation data to help them make decisions, offer better services and increase revenue. However, getting access to this data can be extremely time-consuming and expensive, involving months of navigating regulations and negotiating contracts – all of which will usually only provide access to data from a single satellite.

But Arlula has set out to change that. The early-stage startup is shaking up the industry by building a strategic global network of satellite operators and allowing clients to source and stream data relatively easily through a unique online marketplace. This is creating unprecedented opportunities for satellite suppliers and end users.

A marketplace for space

Arlula was founded in 2018 by Sebastian Chaoui and Arran Salerno after they saw the inefficiencies in the space industry. With a background in space engineering, Chaoui – Arlula’s Chief Executive Officer – previously established Cuberider, the first



Arlula Co-founders: Sebastian Chaoui and Arran Salerno

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Sebastian Chaoui, Co-founder, Arlula

Australian organisation to design, launch and execute a mission on the International Space Station. He met Salerno, a lawyer and entrepreneur, at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

‘Last year we spoke to a startup in Texas that uses artificial intelligence to monitor power infrastructure in America, and it took them six months to negotiate access to two satellite imagery providers,’ says Chaoui. ‘But they still didn’t have enough data to satisfy all of their customers’ needs. We’ve found this problem again and again.’

Arlula’s clients include organisations that manage or monitor large tracts of land, such as agricultural, mining and construction companies. With a number of Australian clients already on board, Chaoui and



Australian Government

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Salerno are using what they learn from these organisations to design advanced software that will allow clients to access Earth observation data in near real time.

Going global and beyond

Arlula was 'born global'. At the core of its business model is access to data from satellites that orbit the planet, owned by organisations across the world.

'We see Australia as a really great place to start because it is such a large continent with many different stakeholders in charge of so many different areas,' says Chaoui. 'But to build our networks and be competitive, we need to be exporting and expanding globally.'

Arlula has now signed up 17 commercial satellites, including one from China and one from South Korea, in addition to a number of open-access satellites. The startup is also finalising agreements with suppliers across the US and Europe. These wins came about thanks to the pair's determination to hit the pavement and build relationships with potential partners.

'Because of Australia's location, it can be hard to close deals,' says Chaoui.

'I say go buy a plane ticket and meet the people that you're trying to do business with,' says Salerno. 'We've also had to learn how people in different countries do business, instead of imposing how we do things in Australia on them.'

Working with Austrade

Chaoui and Salerno say the support they have received from Austrade has been very valuable in their global expansion efforts. In 2018, they won a place on a Landing Pad space bootcamp in San Francisco, sponsored by Austrade and the New South Wales Government.

Austrade's [Landing Pad](#) program helps market-ready Australian startups and scaleups to land and expand in global innovation hubs through introductions to strategic stakeholders and tailored business advice. During the San Francisco Landing Pad, Arula received mentoring from established US space businesses.

'Austrade is very sensitive to the needs of a startup,' says Chaoui. 'Also the fact that Austrade has such a huge network globally is just very, very helpful. This year we're looking at going back to the US and getting our first international clients, and we're definitely going to be leaning on Austrade again.'

Austrade will continue to work with Arlula to help identify key partnerships and opportunities in overseas markets, including in the US.

Star on the rise

The founders of Arlula have big plans and their next steps will see them signing up increasingly larger clients around the world and perfecting their technology to make satellite data more accessible. Over the next year or two, they plan to raise their first round of funding to support the establishment of Arlula offices around the world.

Long term, Arlula sees big opportunities to create new offerings and ecosystems to meet different needs within the space industry.

'We feel like we're in a really good position to identify opportunities for optimising global supply chains for the space industry,' says Chaoui.

And they believe their future ventures won't just benefit the industry.

'The environment of space and space technology provides so many opportunities for people on Earth,' says Salerno. 'We want to explore that potential and I think that will ultimately be for the benefit of everybody.'

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