

IRIDIUM SATELLITE



Matt Desch, Chairman and CEO of Iridium Satellites

Iridium operates the second largest constellation of communication satellites in the world, second only to the United States military. Desch is a lifelong private pilot, passionate about aviation and has some interesting thoughts about the future of flight.

FA: Should pilots have a satellite phone?

MD: Absolutely. Pilots flying cross country seem to have a false sense of security by thinking they can always use their cell phones in the event of an emergency. Actually, we estimate that only about 18% of the planet is covered by cell service. So there are an awful lot of places you can land where you cannot get a cell-phone signal.

FA: Sat phones are expensive.

MD: Air time is now less than a dollar a minute. The same economic trends that have occurred in the land-based cell system have also gone on in the satellite market. And like cell phones, satellite phones are now smaller, have more options, easier to use and considerably less expensive to buy. I think the price of satellite connectivity will go way down. People who think it's expensive now won't think it's expensive five years from now.

FA: Is there really any difference between Iridium satellite service and the other ones out there?

MD: The only other provider out there is Global Star, which has publicly announced their satellites are failing. They have a constellation of about 44 satellites and only about half of them are working. Iridium has 66 satellites working, plus another nine orbiting in backup positions. Global Star reports they won't be back to full strength until late 2010 or early 2011.

FA: But Global Star has had great success with SPOT, which communicates with satellites and costs less than \$200.

MD: I'm a big believer in personal locator beacons. It's great when you push the button that says "help," but you don't really know if anyone on the other end has heard you. Iridium is looking at building a two-communication device.



FA: Most pilots navigate with GPS. Do you see satellites playing a bigger role in the cockpit soon?

MD: Yes, I do. We're working with a number of avionics manufacturers—Garmin, Avidyne, Honeywell—to incorporate Iridium services into aircraft systems.

FA: Services like what?

MD: Voice and data. Right now, for example, Eclipse is installing Iridium phones right in the aircraft. Pilots can dial a normal 10-digit phone number and have a conversation from the cockpit to anyone in the world. And we're legal to use in the air right now. We're also working on a low-cost, higher speed connection that brings Internet connectivity to the cockpit.

FA: I can send e-mail and surf the web while I'm flying?

MD: Yes.

FA: What are you working on that's still several years away?

MD: We have interest in enabling aircraft to update their databases while in flight.

FA: You mean I won't have to go home every few weeks and download an update for my GPS?

MD: Yes, aircraft databases would be updated in flight.

FA: I can't wait.

MD: That's two of us!