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Google-focused satellite enters orbit

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The GeoEye-1 satellite that launched into orbit Saturday is on a mission from Google.

Well, not just Google. The GeoEye-1 is part of the NextView program of the [U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency](#), a dot-mil organization that, odd as it may seem, wants access to commercial satellite imagery to support its national security mission. GeoEye, the company, won its \$500 million NextView contract four years ago.

But the search titan does have the [exclusive rights among online mapping sites](#) to the GeoEye-1 images, which it will use in its Google Earth and Google Maps offerings. It even got its corporate logo emblazoned on the launch rocket, right below Boeing's.

Google co-founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page were on hand at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California for Saturday morning's launch, according to the Reuters news agency.

GeoEye said Saturday afternoon that the satellite had separated from the second stage of the Delta II rocket and was initializing its onboard systems.



Google's rocket-borne logo.
(Credit: GeoEye/ULA)

The GeoEye-1 will zip around the Earth at about 4.5 miles per second, taking both color and black-and-white images from a distance of 423 miles. Its camera can distinguish objects on the ground as small as 16 inches in size, according to GeoEye. Because of U.S. licensing restrictions, Google's resolutions won't be quite that sharp.

High-resolution color images are expected later in the fall.

A GeoEye-2 satellite is scheduled for launch in 2011.

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