to keep innovating, to develop new services that are faster, smaller, cheaper and more accessible for a range of maritime users', said Piers Cunningham, head of maritime services at Inmarsat. 'We developed a maritime broadband service to support the rapidly increasing reliance on data among our user base and their desire to move to IP-based services'.

The company plans to offer two types of terminals (FB250 and FB500) with different performance capabilities available from multiple manufacturers, both of which will use stabilised, directional antennas.

Cunningham says Inmarsat is not worried by the competition. 'Of course our partners want to be able to offer the full range of technologies to their customers, although most still focus primarily on Inmarsat services', he says, adding 'We expect our forthcoming service, FleetBroadband, to defer the need of vessels to explore VSAT. It will take the technical excellence, reliability and quality of service that people have come to expect from our Fleet services, and place it in a global broadband environment. For many who would have considered VSAT, there will an attractive alternative in FleetBroadband'. ∎

ELECTRONIC CHART DATA A GO-GO

Connectivity is a key commodity in today's maritime industry and this is particularly the case for electronic chart companies. To fully realie the benefits of their electronic medium they have to provide owners with up-to-date cartographic data on shipping channels, hazards and navigational aids.

∎ Jason Critides

Chart supplier Islamorada International, which is located on the Panama Canal, has just become a remote printing agent for Oceangrafix. 'The largest share of trade through the Panama Canal is travelling between the Far East and the US East Coast', explains director Jason Critides. 'Working with OceanGrafix, we now have the ability for our NOAA (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration) charts to reflect the very latest Notice to Mariners changes so that vessels can use them prior to arriving at a US port.'

'Our computers are in constant contact with NOAA databases to gather the changes', adds Dave DeGree, president of OceanGrafix . 'They can print charts as they're ordered, offering the most up-to-date National Ocean Service (NOS) charts while not having to keep quickly outdated charts in stock'.

Another company catering to this trend in the market is C-MAP, now part of Jeppesen Marine, which has introduced an innovative 'dynamic licensing' policy for its Electronic Navigation Chart (ENC) systems. 'The idea is that companies should only pay for the charts they are using, which is why we have introduced this 'pay as you go' system. Here charts on the vessel are updated for the region the ship is in and are licensed for up to three months at a stretch', says Tor A Svanes, head of Jeppesen's high seas division.

The maps, which are automatically updated on board via satcom connections, are divided into nine regions based on geographical location. Up to date information can also be downloaded from C-MAP's database.

In addition, a new integrated navigation software package called C-MAP WeatherNav exists that combines its electronic chart database with a precise marine weather forecast.

SES TURNS 20

Innovative shipping software company SES celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The company was founded in 1987 by AN Vardakis and inherited important know-how from his work for Thenamaris and the Onassis Group.

The company continues to flourish and says its customised ERP (enterprise resource planning) solutions and other specialised software is now installed in hundreds of shipmanagement companies in 41 countries around the world.

However, it identifies 'tech-phobia' as a continuing obstacle in the shipping industry. According to SES research only 27% of the 700 shipping companies in Piraeus have computerised technical departments despite their proven advantages of 'reducing operating costs and errors'.

Nevertheless the first quarter of 2007 saw five new companies in Greece, plus one apiece in Singapore and in Montenegro, entrust SES with the installation of their accounting and maintenance systems.

SES says that in September it will be premiering new specialised software as well as latest versions of existing products (eg Smart Version 5.5). It also plans to launch a revamped website to better serve its clients. See www.vardakis.com.