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GETTING TO THE MOON WITH THE GOOGLE LUNAR X PRIZE

Abstract

Civil space agencies and commercial enterprises alike are getting ready to embark on a new era of lunar exploration – an era which is most markedly defined by strong ambitions toward long-term, sustainable exploration of the lunar surface. Government space agencies worldwide have expressed intentions to return to the Moon in the near-term; and entrepreneurs are eying the Moon’s rich resources and weighing potential opportunities for the provision of services and hardware to governments and industries as they pursue future exploration objectives.

With such commercial ventures and opportunities in mind, the Google Lunar X PRIZE was launched in 2007 to incentivize commercial robotic exploration of the lunar surface. Offering a cumulative prize of *US\$30 million to the first privately-funded team to land and travel 500 m on the Moon’s surface, the Google Lunar X PRIZE Exploration in an effective manner.*

Over four years after the announcement of the prize, 26 teams are currently participating in the competition with headquarters based in locations around the world. These teams are already producing an interesting array of designs and solutions, ranging from traditional lunar vehicle and mission designs to a variety of completely new and innovative approaches to lunar exploration. All teams are currently working toward the goal of getting back to the Moon by December 31, 2015 prize deadline.

The competitors for the Google Lunar X PRIZE are also pursuing a number of potential commercial lunar markets, including the delivery of scientific payloads to the lunar surface and the development of key technologies and services that will complement exploration goals. The teams are aggressively working toward maximizing their capability to serve future customers in academic, government, and commercial sectors. This paper and accompanying presentation will summarize the progress of the competing Google Lunar X PRIZE teams and some of the opportunities that they plan to provide to the lunar science community in both the near- and long-term, as they pursue the prize purse and build sustainable businesses that will persist well beyond the prize deadline.