ULIS celebrates a 15-year 20% annual growth rate in thermal image sensors

Company will double R&D spending to target growth opportunities in consumer markets and outpace new entrants in thermal detection

Veurey-Vorioze, near Grenoble, France, June 12, 2017 – ULIS, a manufacturer of innovative thermal sensors, today announces the company will again significantly increase its R&D spending for 2017 to reach €15M ($16.8M). This investment marks the company's strong growth and market leadership progression over the last 15 years. ULIS generated €61.5M ($69.3M) in sales in 2016, a rise of nearly 30% compared to 2015.

Buoyed by the spurt in additional growth and market changes, ULIS' new level of R&D investment will represent 20% of its annual sales. Previously, the company pledged 10% of its annual revenue to R&D. It aims to further simplify access to thermal imaging within growing smart building, automotive and consumer electronics markets by making the key component – the thermal sensor – more compact, more affordable, easier to integrate and available in mass volumes.

As applications of thermal imaging become increasingly diversified, attracting new players worldwide, ULIS deems this investment necessary to sustain the pace of market developments and further advance its market lead. ULIS exports 97% of its products.

ULIS will accelerate the design of models and features better adapted to system maker and end-user needs in new markets (leisure equipment, smart buildings, driving assistance for cars with or without drivers, etc.). It will pursue development of disruptive technologies that reach new heights in performance of thermal image sensors for clients in traditional markets, for example defense and security. The company will also commence 24/7 non-stop production to meet new demands for mass volume.

"ULIS is happy to mark its 15th anniversary with an even stronger commitment to democratizing thermal image sensors, making them available and affordable for all," said Jean-François Delepau, managing director of ULIS. "It has taken an enormous investment in capital, human resources, skills and technological expertise and much dedication from ULIS staff to gain the market confidence in our products and innovations that we enjoy today. We are very grateful to our customers and the ULIS team. Today, the diversity of market applications for thermal imaging is creating a new dynamic; changing the rules of the game. The barrier to entry has been raised. Success requires a greater intensification of resources and state-of-the-art know-how across all domains, plus the experience to transform these assets into value-added products. We look forward to fulfilling our promise to provide thermal sensors that are the best suited to meeting market demands for the right performance and quality at the right cost."

Since its founding in 2002 as a spin-off from CEA-Leti, ULIS has become the second largest producer of thermal image sensors (microbolometers) for defense, surveillance, thermography, firefighting, outdoor leisure and automotive markets. It offers a targeted range of high-quality, compact, low-cost microbolometers that are the key component of many top brand cameras and thermal imaging equipment sold across Europe, Asia and North America.

The company that started with 35 staff now employs 200. It has experienced double-digit growth, averaging 20% per year since its inception.

Over its 15 years, ULIS has continually developed its technological know-how by investing heavily in developing disruptive technologies that have slashed the size, weight and power consumption of components by a factor of 10. There are long cycles of development in this field. Typically, it can take 10 years of research before being able to exploit a technology and transform it into a working product.

In addition, ULIS has injected €70M ($78.7M) to improve production tools and processes, enabling an increase in volume production from a couple of thousand units per year to several hundred thousand. It will soon deliver its one millionth component.

Among ULIS' achievements is the key disruptive vacuum technology it pioneered in 2007. It integrated ceramic packaging to drastically cut overall costs and found new applications in 24/7 video surveillance, firefighting equipment and thermography. The 17-micron pixel pitch followed in 2009, setting the industry standard for hi-definition thermal imaging. In 2014, ULIS produced the first megapixel thermal image sensor offering frame rates twice as high as competing models for large panoramic field of view and fast target detection. Since then, ULIS has produced 12-micron pixel pitch sensors designed with a unique miniaturization technology, making them suitable for outdoor leisure/observation, thermography and surveillance.

"The achievements of the last 15 years are a true testament of the ULIS team's dynamism and commitment to our company values of solidarity and integrity in the service of performance and innovation," Delepau added.

About ULIS
ULIS, a subsidiary of Sofradir, specializes in designing and manufacturing innovative thermal image sensors for the surveillance, thermography, firefighting, outdoor leisure and automotive markets. It enables makers of consumer electronics and infrared equipment to produce low weight, low power consumption and cost-effective thermal cameras in high volume.
Founded in 2002, ULIS has grown to become the second largest producer of thermal image sensors (microbolometers). It offers a targeted range of microbolometers that are the key component of many top brands in thermal imaging equipment sold across Europe, Asia and North America. Size, weight, low power consumption and cost reductions drive ULIS innovations, enabling the company to address new trends in smart buildings, road safety and in-cabin comfort of vehicles. ULIS is located in Veurey-Voroize, near Grenoble.
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