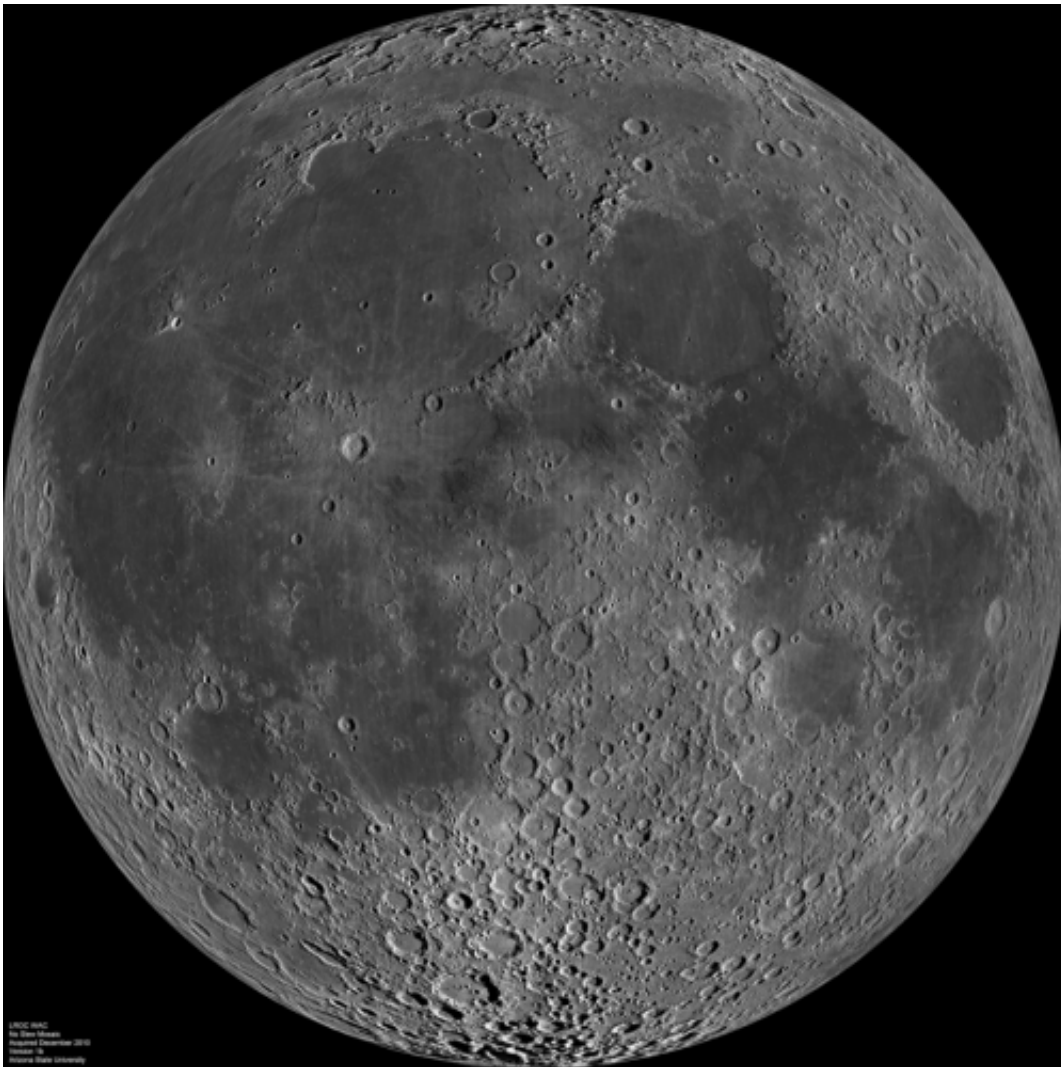


Moon Express, Rocket Lab set for 2017 mission plan

October 5 2015, by Nancy Owano



This is a composite image of the lunar nearside taken by the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter in June 2009, note the presence of dark areas of maria on this side of the moon. Credit: NASA

In 2017 a private moon landing could make news. If the mission is successful, said *GeekWire*, Moon Express could become the first privately backed venture to achieve a soft [lunar](#) landing.

Bob Richards is CEO of Moon Express and he announced the launch plan earlier this month at the Space Technology & Investment Summit in San Francisco.

The plan involves a series of robotic spacecraft designed for exploration—and commercial development. The company site noted, "Most of the elements that are rare on Earth are believed to have originated from space, and are largely on the surface of the Moon."

Back in 2013, it was quite clear that California-based Moon Express was working on the goal to do so, namely to fly commercial missions to the moon and unlock its resources. This month comes news that the company signed the launch deal with Rocket Lab, with the first to take place in 2017.

California-based Moon Express signed up Rocket Lab to launch its robotic spacecraft. Reuters said the Rocket Lab Electron rocket system was to launch three missions of Moon Express' MX-1 lunar lander spacecraft, starting 2017. According to a *GeekWire* report, Moon Express was building and testing versions of its MX-1 lander. CEO Bob Richards said it was being scaled down to a mass of 200 kilograms (440 pounds), including fuel.

Naveen Jain, a co-founder of Moon Express, reported CNBC, said that rocket technology accelerated in the last year, making it possible for Moon Express to build lunar [landers](#) which can use small rockets designed for low earth orbit such as Rocket Lab's design.

Rocket Lab uses battery-powered rocket engines that are cheaper than

traditional [engines](#), said Reuters.

According to CNBC, Jain said the Moon Express design uses two small landers on top of each other. The first acts like a booster rocket and the second, the lander for the lunar surface.

In a video published in 2013, a laughing interviewer said, "I suppose your company [Moon Express] is getting me closer to the day when I might find myself on the moon." Jain smiled. "The moon is nothing but another continent, from our perspective... We want to make use of the resources to make life better for all of us here."

The company stated on its site that "We believe it's critical for humanity to become a multi-world species and that our sister world, the Moon, is an eighth continent holding vast resources than can help us enrich and secure our future."

The Moon Express' MX-1 lander will be blasted into space aboard Rocket Lab's Electron [rocket](#). Richards, according to *Geek Wire*, said Moon Express has two launches on Rocket Lab's manifest in 2017 and contracted for a third launch at a time to be determined, with options for a fourth and fifth launch.

Moon Express said it believes it is "forging a new paradigm, combining best practices of traditional aerospace know how with the innovation and entrepreneurial culture of Silicon Valley."

More information: www.moonexpress.com/

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