

21st Century Carrier Pigeons



The word “*Drone*” has come a long way from merely defining “a male honey bee” or a “robot in general”. Today “unmanned aerial vehicle” is its most common association – just ask certain governments how they have been using them for spying purposes. Notwithstanding, some innovative young companies have taken it to the next level and made their drones accessible to the public with prices as low as about \$100 (€75).

Professional photographers were among the first to discover that mounting a camera on an airborne drone rendered them views that were heretofore impossible to obtain unless you were a bird! Now hundreds of amateurs around the world are purchasing these devices and letting them loose, using them as playful diversions, employing their built-in cameras, and many times being somewhat voyeuristic. There are now even “Apps” that work with drones and allow their operator access and manipulation via their Smartphones and mobile devices. Amazon, the world’s most successful e-retailer, has already tested using drones for product delivery in a local area as well as being used to move merchandise in their gigantic warehouses. With a world of possibilities ahead, it is easy to see that we have seen just the tip of the iceberg and a lot more lies ahead.

Much like model airplanes, drones are remotely managed, are small in scale (some fit in the palm of your hand), versatile, flexible in range and just require the user to learn how to work with it; think of them as a cross between a video game and a remote control car. The results of using drones with built-in cameras depend on their owner’s curiosity and creativity – visit http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/04/stunning-drone-videos_n_5579199.html?utm_hp_ref=drones#

for examples that range from disturbing to awesome. As with any new device on the market, new rules and repercussions arise. Lack of privacy, security infringement, “air traffic” dangers as well as the physical threat to pedestrians and passersby are the latest complaints: some operators have either crashed or lost their drones while others have flown off and never come back, having landed who-knows-where. Hmmm, sounds like the early days of cars and airplanes!

Nevertheless, there are lots of curious consumers who can’t wait to get their hands on these devices so for the more adventurous readers out there, check out www.dji.com and <http://ardrone2.parrot.com/>. The potential for drone usage is wide open: in health care facilities and all kinds of offices for in-house document deliveries, large retail warehouses, as an aid for non-mobile persons, monitoring student activities, and so on. Even the field of archaeology is reaping the benefits of these devices: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/14/arts/design/drones-are-used-to-patrol-endangered-archaeological-sites.html? r=0>

This is just another 21st century tool that in conjunction with other hardware and software will lead to more inventions and uses. Man has indeed come a long way from using carrier pigeons to deliver messages!