Working Remotely: What to Know About Using Drones for Your Business

Jillian Switzer (AirMap), Photo © John Livzey, 2017

There's never been a better time to become a pilot. A remote pilot, that is.

According to the FAA, unmanned aircraft, or drones, could create 100,000 U.S. jobs in the next 10 years and generate over $82 billion for the U.S. economy. Almost 3 million drones were purchased in 2016 alone, and the FAA estimates that this number will reach 7 million annually by 2020. The market intelligence firm Tractica has projected that global consumer drone sales will surge by a factor of 10x over the 10 years, from 6.4 million in 2015 to 67.9 million by 2021.

In response to this unprecedented demand and rapid industry growth, last summer the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced the final Small UAS (sUAS) Rule. The new rule, Part 107 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR), provides the first national, uniform regulations for the commercial operation of drones between .55 and 55 lbs.

In layman's terms, the FAA and DOT just made it a whole lot easier for you to fly your drone for cash.

Before, individuals and companies wanting to operate drones for commercial purposes had to get permission from the FAA via a Section 333 exemption, which took an estimated 4-6 months to obtain, thanks to an ever-growing backlog at the FAA office. Now, Part 107 extends blanket approval for commercial operations, pursuant to standard safety and operational requirements.

The requirements for commercial drone operations under part 107 are simple: pass the FAA Knowledge Test and a standard TSA background check, and you're certified. Assuming you fly during daytime hours, within visual line-of-sight, avoid non-participating people and structures, and get permission from Air Traffic Control when operating in controlled airspace, you can legally fly drones for your business.

Part 107 and the availability of affordable, prosumer drones means that many companies that could never afford an aircraft can now access the airspace at a significantly lower price point with a drone. By opening American airspace for safe, responsible use of small unmanned aircraft, Part 107 is an exciting milestone encouraging the rapid acceleration of the drone economy.

We are already seeing drones being used for cinematography, aerial mapping, crop-dusting, law enforcement, crisis response, logistics, entertainment, and more. But drones are ideal for any jobs that fall into one of the three Ds: dirty, dull, or dangerous for humans. Imagine using drones in areas where

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manned flight is risky and generally not permitted (close to buildings, towers, or bridges). Such operations have the potential to save lives.

For companies and entrepreneurs wondering where to start, there are myriad ways to enter the drone economy. Licensed remote pilots can offer their services freelance through marketplaces like DroneBase. Software developers can make cutting-edge fleet management or data analytics apps for drones with AirMap's developer tools. Hardware manufacturers can build chipsets, sensors, cameras, and more for the next generation of drones. Connected citizens can get involved in promoting the industry through drone enabling education and policy.

Whatever future you can imagine for drones – from package delivery to flying cars – it's clear that drones will benefit our lives in ways we can't imagine today through coordinated collaboration across the industry.

Together, we'll reach new heights.

This article was written by Jillian Switzer. Switzer leads product marketing at AirMap, the leading global provider of low-altitude airspace management services for drones. She is a licensed remote pilot as well as a certified student pilot of light sport aircraft. She lives in Santa Monica.

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