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## TECHNOLOGY

# Can Drones Revolutionise Business?

By [Nikita Saxena](#) - 01 Sep '14

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Photo/Image: Airpix

A brand that is able to crack the code of delivering through drones will reap several benefits. Apart from the 'coolness quotient', it can prove to be an economically sound innovation that saves costs, fuel and time.

Imagine waking up to the buzzing sound of what seems to be a lawn mower right outside your front door. As you groggily make your way to welcome this unexpected

guest, a tiny aircraft hovering around 20 feet in the air registers you with its camera eye, delivers the package you had almost forgotten about ordering online and whirls off. No, this isn't badly written science fiction; it might be a fast approaching reality. In December last year, Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos created a sizeable stir by announcing that his company aimed to start 30-minute deliveries using drones, more recently suggesting that such [deliveries may start in India](#) by as early as Diwali. Closer home, Fransesco's Pizzeria in Mumbai was trending on social media thanks to a video (which went viral) of a drone-aided pizza delivery. Although it was later found that the video was a hoax, the incident generated a lot of digital chatter. Drones have been employed more successfully in the Panna Tiger Reserve at Madhya Pradesh. Here, conservation drones keep a watchful eye on the sanctuary's tigers and prospective poachers. In Uttarakhand, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) used pilotless drones during search and rescue operations of flood victims in June 2013.

Entrepreneurs operating within this growing industry in India are convinced that they are on the cusp of something revolutionary. As Shinil Shekhar, CMO and co-founder of [Airpix](#), puts it, "The most exciting part about the business is the technology itself. The things you can do with it and the speed at which they can be done are amazing."

But do commercial drones really have it in them to be truly disruptive for businesses? Most governing bodies across the world are clueless about how to proceed with rules and restrictions. They look to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) of the USA for benchmarks. However, the FAA itself has not formulated any concrete guidelines for the use of drones for commercial purposes yet. So far, despite the regulatory ambiguity around the use of drones (most governing bodies across the world are clueless about how to proceed with rules and restrictions), the devices have begun to be used in imaginative ways by some, especially for cinematography, marketing campaigns and delivery. Let's take a closer look at the potential impact, and the challenges of using drones in these industries.

### **Cinematography and Marketing:**

## The High Fliers

A quick look at some Indian companies plotting a journey into the unknown world of drones.



IdeaForge's  
NetraAv2

**IdeaForge:** Founded by Ankit Mehta, Ashish Bhat, Rahul Singh, Vipul Joshi, and Amardeep Singh, IdeaForge is in the business of developing components for aerial vehicles. The founders studied at IIT Bombay, and one of them was obsessed with building an aerial vehicle out of junk. This project brought the group together. Today, the company has 70 operational UAVs. It has also collaborated with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to create Netra, an autonomous hovering machine, which was used during rescue operations during the Uttarakhand floods.

For marketers still finding their feet around the application of drones, the initial phase of adoption has revolved around using these gadgets to innovate with cinematography. Advertisements that were hitherto limited by restrictive budgets can now benefit from the frills of the unconventional use of aerial photography. A case in point is the new Mahindra XUV 500 advertisement which used aerial imagery to shoot tumultuous terrain. In May this year, as election fever across the country was peaking, news broadcaster Headlines Today launched Election Express, a moving news studio inside a bus that travelled more than 8,000 km in 45 days across several constituencies. This unique makeshift studio was also distinguished by the perpetual presence of a flying camera, be it during an aerial shot of the massive rallies in Varanasi or a moving interview with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav on a bicycle. Quidich, a Delhi-based company that specialises in aerial photography, deployed two quadcopters and one octocopter for the show, marking one of the first uses of commercial drones by broadcast channels. Pleased with the results, the TV Today Group has continued its association with Quidich for a special programme on cleaning the river Ganga called 'Har Har Gangay'.

Ankit Mehta, co-founder of Mumbai-based drone manufacturer [IdeaForge](#), was recently approached by an event management company which wanted to use their drones to airdrop beverage cans on the audience. While such ideas may sound unrealistic at worst and gimmicky at best, popular drinks brand Sprite executed a unique guerilla marketing campaign using a similar strategy. The brand launched its new Sprite Zero on the beaches of Turkey by using a GPS based app that was advertised

through posters on the beach. Once activated by a person on the beach, a mini Sprite plane would fly across to the beachcombers and douse them with a refreshing and localised water shower before dropping a can of Sprite Zero; a great example of a branding splash with the right audience at the right time.

In true Indian style, the ability to deliver gimmicks, has been well embraced by India's fast-growing wedding market. Drones are in demand for mega weddings in Delhi and Mumbai. For example, instead of the conventional jib, a crane-like mechanism that supports a camera on one end and a counterweight on the other to produce shots from a great distance, some enterprising wedding photographers are now acquiring drones to enhance filming at big weddings. Interestingly, drones aren't used at the big, fat Indian

#### Real Estate:

### The High Fliers



*Quidich's drone at work for Headline Today*

**Quidich:** Quidich was founded almost by accident when the company's co-founder Rahat Kulshreshtha, a filmmaker, was struggling to find low cost options for aerial photography. Kulshreshtha discovered that services in India for low-cost aerial footage were literally non-existent. He spotted a business opportunity, and teamed up with Gaurav Mehta and Tanuj Bhojwani to start Quidich. Quidich's model is based on customising and renting drone-based camera equipment for their clients. It has already worked with TV Today, NDTV, RedBull and Volkswagen.

Given the existing deployment of commercial drones in surveillance and mapping activities for the government and paramilitary forces in India, a possibility now being explored is their use in real estate projects. For commercial developers and prospective buyers alike, being able to get a bird's eye view of the property in question adds accountability. "Let's say you want to show a prospective customer what the view will be like from a certain height and altitude of your future project. That experience can be created and shared with end customers using drones," says Mehta from IdeaForge. IndiaProperty, an online real estate portal is exploring this possibility and has recently launched a 3D Virtual Property Tour. This feature provides the user with a view of a finished project along with the status of the availability of the property. The company has mapped 1,500

projects on its 3D format, and aims to do so for 3,000 more over the next few months. wedding only for photography. Some have been commissioned to shower the bride and groom with flowers in what is the perfect modern avatar of heavenly blessings. Can this become a regular practice? Tanuj Bhojwani, co-founder and CTO of [Quidich](#), says it won't be easy despite the affordable price points (a basic version of a hobby grade drone that is used at these gigs costs between Rs 1—1.5 Lakh, and can usually be rented for Rs 8,000 to 10,000 a day). For one, shooting with these devices is fraught with unexpected hazards. Navigating the flight of a machine that can weigh up to 10 to 11 kilos is no mean feat, Bhojwani says. "You have to be alert at every point. The biggest fear and problem is that somebody who is not well trained or does not appreciate these challenges enough will do something stupid," he adds. IdeaForge's

## The High Fliers



*Airpix's drone at work*

**Airpix:** Bewildered with the prospect of a small flying copter that had the capability of capturing images, Aniket Tati-pamula, one of the founders of Airpix began working on a prototype out of the laboratory at VJI College, Mumbai. He was soon joined by Rajesh Mane, Neeraj Wagchaure and Shinil Shekhar. The company has a range of drones which can be used for data collection, orthomapping, aerial surveying and aerial cinematography. It counts Omkar 1973, The Imperial, The Vivarea, Mumbai Police, Reliance Energy and Lodha Builders as its clients.

The clientele for this kind of location mapping isn't necessarily restricted to just real estate marketers. Mehta recounts an incident in which a colleague was approached by an educational institution that had undertaken a security mapping exercise for its campus. While this has conventionally been the domain of helicopters which costs up to Rs 6 Lakhs for an hour's worth of flight, a commercial drone would be able to produce the requisite high resolution imagery at barely 1/6th the cost, Mehta adds. Mehta echoes the worry. "More reliable systems have to be used for deployment in areas where public safety is a concern. A lot of these gimmicky operations in particular should not be allowed, unless they are done after much preparation." In September last year, a camera drone used during an election campaign in Berlin flew across the unsuspecting crowd and crashed on the podium where German Chancellor Angela Merkel was seated.

## Supply Chain Operations:

While the delivery of products using commercial drones is an attractive proposition, it is one that is still some way off given the technical challenges and cost of capital involved. The autonomous delivery of products using commercial drones would require precise navigation to make sure the devices don't become safety hazards. "It's not a simple matter of these drones lifting a load from Point A to Point B. How do you ensure, for instance, that you're landing the drone in a safe spot, how do you ensure you're not hitting anything, how do you ensure the person supposed to get the deliveries is really the one collecting it," cautions Quidich's Bhojwani.

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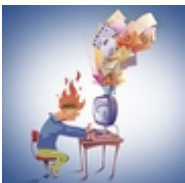
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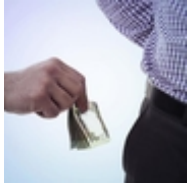


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