

The Commercial Drone Phenomenon

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Commercial drones are quickly becoming a reality. Medical companies, energy companies, retail stores and many others have petitioned the Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”) to lift the ban on flying drones, known as unmanned aerial systems (“UAS”), for commercial use. The following companies have made recent headlines for their plans to use commercial drones.

Amazon PrimeAir

Late last year Amazon revealed plans for [PrimeAir](#), a delivery system that uses drones to deliver products purchased on Amazon. However, according to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the actual drones – referred to as “octocopters” – won’t actually be ready to take flight for another four to five years. The current models have a range of ten miles and can handle products under five pounds (a criteria met by 90% of the products offered on Amazon). Amazon PrimeAir could mean quick and efficient deliveries for consumers.

QuiQui, the Drug Delivery Drone

[QuiQui](#), a Bay Area startup is testing drones that would deliver medicine to San Francisco residents. Through a phone application, customers would be able to order medicine (*e.g.*, Advil, Tylenol) and technicians will prepare the order and attach it to the drone. The drone will then deliver the medicine just eight to twelve minutes after the order has been placed, notifying users when the drone has arrived. Users will be able to “swipe to drop,” which will lead the drone to drop the order with a streamer. The company’s founder, 28-year-old Josh Ziering differentiates QuiQui from Amazon PrimeAir, claiming that QuiQui can operate faster and with more flexibility than PrimeAir “because [QuiQui doesn’t] have the accountability to shareholders and stockholders.”

The 3-D Printed Drone

Engineers at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom [printed a working drone](#) earlier this year and it took less than 24 hours to make it. The five-foot-wide drone composed of nine pieces that snap together is remote-controlled and weighs just over four pounds. The creators of the drone anticipate that it could be used for a variety of purposes including, but not limited to: package delivery, intelligence-gathering, and search-and-rescue missions. Furthermore, the low production cost of the vehicle could allow it to be used for one-way flights and be disposed of once its purpose has been served.

Regulatory Blocks

The FAA is working on [relaxing restrictions](#) for commercial drone use, but the current regulations prohibit these types of deliveries. Some anticipate changes in FAA regulations as

early as 2015. Until regulations change, however, products and services like those offered by QuiQui and Amazon PrimeAir may be stifled before they (literally) get off the ground.