

DRONE ! The flying robot-cameras

Slinger, 2018

The flying robot-cameras represent a huge savings for production seven companies are FAA approved

Hollywood is facing the attack of the drones.

The first FAA-approved flight with a drone lifted off earlier this week in the hills of Pasadena and now everyone from major studio executives to indie producers have their eyes trained upward to be next in the air.

It's been overwhelming, said Tony Carmean, partner and producer at Aerial MOB, which conducted the historic drone flight to shoot an Acura commercial. Just in the last two weeks we've met with Sony, we've met with Warner Bros. we've met with probably half of the major studios. The other studios are just a matter of arranging time.

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For filmmakers, drones are a cool new tool. But drones also represent a huge cost savings for productions that are seeking images from on high, as low as a third of the cost of traditional transport like helicopters.

Seven companies have been approved to use drones in movie, television and advertising production. In addition to Aerial MOB, Astraeus Aerial, Snaproll Media, Vortex Aerial, Pictorvision, HeliVideo Productions and Flying-Cam now have the right to use drones for films, TV and commercials on closed sets.

Video provided by Vortex Aerial

Sony opened up Soundstage 20 on their lot where we came in and did a demonstration for not only the production safety folks but also for the production people. Up to this point they haven't been able to use this technology, Carmean said.

I've done 10 quotes for feature films this month, he noted.

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While filming with drones was legal in other countries and was used on productions such as Skyfall and Harry Potter, the FAA prohibited the use of drones for commercial U.S. filming until the ban was lifted in September. The government agency is still

scrutinizing the process.

The FAA was on site, said Carmean regarding the Acura shoot. We sat down with them for two hours and went over our paperwork that we had to file with the FAA in D.C. and it was meticulous. And then they stayed on set watching us perform what we do. They walked away saying 'we really have no issues at all.'

But even though the FAA said 'all clear' the major film studios are moving cautiously.

At that level I think it's going to be a little bit slow development. No doubt they're very excited by it, Carmean said. But as a studio they're legal exposure is a lot greater than a small production company. Their lawyers would not let them touch the technology until it was deemed safe by the FAA.

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Considerations regarding the unions is one of the issues at hand.

Not only are our phones ringing off the hooks for jobs from potential clients, but also people wanting to work for us, said Carmean. People at the union level, local 600 and local 80, they're being very open. They've made it very appealing to be in the union. But there's a lot of little details going on behind the scenes that have to be figured out. That's why the delay in the movie stuff. But I'm thinking in the next 30 days it's going to pick up in a big way.

Drone

Photo Credit: Tony Carmean

For their part, the leadership at International Cinematographers Guild is excited by the potential of filming with drones.

I can go back in my filmography and say, wow if I'd only had a drone here, Guild President Steven Poster told TheWrap. They're an exciting possibility for visual storytelling. It's always terrific to get a new tool like that.

So what has Hollywood flying high on drones? Savings.

Drone V. Helicopter

The day rate for a helicopter can range from \$20,000 to \$40,000 with crew. Operating a drone with crew can cut costs down to a rate that ranges between \$9,000 to \$15,000, according to Carmean. Elements that affect drone day rates pends the camera, aircraft, crew and location.

The possibility of making shots that you couldn't do before is extremely exciting. A director and a director of photography can say I want this shot in a movie and we can get it without a helicopter, said Poster.

The insurance; it's a lot cheaper to insure a 25-pound drone than it is to insure a three-ton helicopter, Chris Schuster, CEO and lead drone pilot at Vortex Aerial told TheWrap.

Drone Ocean

Photo Credit: Tony Carmean

Productions can also cut costs by staying local.

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There's been productions that have gone outside the country specifically for the use of drones. Now they won't have to do that, said Carmean.

The drone crew's speed and nimbleness are assets as well, they often operate with a team of two to four members.

We have a very small footprint that's very efficient. We work very fast and production just loves that, said Schuster. They want to get in and get their shots and move on to the next item.

And the drone can help eliminate multiple setups during the shoot day.

A lot of people think when they think drones of the big, wide aerial shots, said Carmean. That's not the beauty of what this offers. The beauty is low-altitude cinematography. Think of that space in-between jibs and full-sized aircraft. There's a big area that's not covered. We're able to do that. In a lot of ways we can replace dollies, jibs and cranes.

Still, it may take a year or so before the industry figures out when to use the new technology.

It's like when the Steadicam came out, everybody wanted to use it for everything, said Poster. I guarantee you that probably within the next year somebody is going to try and do an entire movie on a drone. But eventually it will become just the right tool for the right job.