

Is it too late to make money with drones?

The cost of a typical camera drone has plummeted while they have become easier and easier to operate and now offer many automated functions and obstacle avoidance. With “anyone capable of getting great footage”, the question keeps coming up “is it too late to make money with drones?”.

Let’s use another situation to find the answer...back around 15 years ago wedding photography was a lucrative business. Even those of us without “high end” customers were getting \$2,500 - \$3,000 for a wedding while providing excellent photos and wedding albums for our clients. All of a sudden a decent DSLR and kit lens finally broke the \$1,500 mark with cameras like the Canon Rebel. Instantly the barrier of entry was lowered and massive numbers of photographers sprang up out of nowhere. The vast majority of these “Moms with Cameras” started offering wedding photography for insane prices, often as low as \$250 and even offering to shoot weddings for free to get experience.

The price of wedding photography plummeted (as did the average quality). This new crop of wedding photographers would show up with nothing more than their camera and kit lens and get to it while us more experience photographers are showing up with half a dozen lenses, multiple flash heads, reflectors, assistants, and most importantly.....experience.

It became harder and harder to make decent money shooting weddings, brides simply thought that anyone with a DSLR could create the same images. This trend continued for about three years. Wedding sites and forums filled with horror story after horror story of horrible pictures, bad editing, poor delivery, inability to create albums, and not getting the right shots.

Eventually, the wedding market began to recover as brides (almost always the one to pick the photographer) realized that you had to pay for good quality. While there are always going to be super low cost people out there, it is much easier now to get decent pay if you can

deliver top notch results.

What does this have to do with drones? Well the situation is almost identical except instead of Moms with Cameras, we now have Dads with Drones. Everyone that is dropping \$1000+ on a drone starts thinking about how they can make money with it. I have watched real estate work drop from \$450 a house to as low as \$50 a house in some places. But what else has happened now, just like it did before? The quality of the work has dropped accordingly.

It takes much more than an automated copter to get great photos and video. Maybe the aircraft can perform butter-smooth orbits but if you are shooting into the sun you are going to destroy your contrast and saturation. If you don't understand how to setup your camera right, your exposure will be off. If you don't know how to edit the photos later, you can't make them "pop".

I have seen many "commercial videos" that have had the props get in the shot, prop shadows causing lines in the video, just to name a few of the common issues.

Sure, we are heading into a market that will be saturated with low-prices operators but it is going to be the people who know how to fly, know how to get the angles, know when best to get the shots, understand exposure, and know how to edit that will survive this initial hit. It is only a matter of time before simple having an aerial photo, and having a great aerial photo will come to be noticed by the customers.

If you are getting into drones as a potential revenue source, don't stop with just learning how to fly, you will need to "master the art" which means learning how to do more complicated moves in the air as well as having a firm grasp of photography.

When someone asks “what are the best settings to use to shoot a house”, you need to know that there is no one answer, there are a ton of variables that go into that and knowing how to get the answer when you arrive on location is one of the things that will separate you from the herd.

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