

Drones doing business in the sky above you

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

Drones, once known as weapons of war, are undergoing a dramatic makeover as a hot new business tool in the sky. But, as with unmanned military craft, domestic drones are prompting concerns over safety and privacy.

No agency tracks how many drones are now buzzing overhead. But it's likely hundreds a day hit the skies nationally on commercial missions, equipped with video cameras and launched by entrepreneurs looking for faster, cheaper and easier ways to provide services. In Northern California, lightweight drones, some hardly bigger than a Frisbee, shoot dramatic bird's-eye videos of ski races in Tahoe and outdoor weddings in the foothills. They provide aerial footage for car commercials in Roseville and real estate promotions in West Sacramento.

The new breed of small domestic drones – known more formally as “unmanned aviation systems” or “remotely piloted aircraft” – can sell for \$1,000 to tens of thousands of dollars, depending on size and sophistication. Users say operating the remote-controlled, spider-like craft costs far less than hiring a helicopter or plane, and allows users to fly into tight spaces, including indoors.

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