

Amazon.com sees delivery drones as future (Update)

December 2 2013, by Scott Mayerowitz



This undated image provided by Amazon.com shows the so-called Prime Air unmanned aircraft project that Amazon is working on in its research and development labs. Amazon says it will take years to advance the technology and for the Federal Aviation Administration to create the necessary rules and regulations, but CEO Jeff Bezos said Sunday Dec. 1, 2013, there's no reason Drones can't help get goods to customers in 30 minutes or less. (AP Photo/Amazon)

Amazon.com is working on a way to get customers their goods in 30 minutes or less—by drone.

The world's largest e-commerce company said it's working on the so-

called Prime Air unmanned aircraft project in its research and development labs. But Amazon says it will take years to advance the technology and for the Federal Aviation Administration to create the necessary rules and regulations.

The project was first reported Sunday by CBS' "60 Minutes" TV newsmagazine.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos said in a primetime interview that while the octocopters look like something out of science fiction, there's no reason they can't be used as delivery vehicles.

Bezos said the drones can carry packages that weigh up to five pounds (2.3 kilograms), which covers about 86 percent of the items Amazon delivers. The current generation of drones the company is testing has a range of about 10 miles (16 kilometers), which Bezos noted could cover a significant portion of the population in urban areas.

While it's tough to say exactly how long it could take the project to get off the ground, Bezos told "60 Minutes" that he thinks it could happen in four or five years.

One of the biggest promises for civilian drone use has been in agriculture.

The unmanned aircraft can fly over large fields and search out bugs, rodents and other animals that might harm crops. Then, thanks to GPS, another drone could come back and spread pesticide on that small quadrant of the field.



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Agriculture is also seen as the most-promising use because of the industry's largely unpopulated, wide open spaces. Delivering Amazon packages in midtown Manhattan will be much trickier.

Besides regulatory approval, Amazon's biggest challenge will be to develop a collision avoidance system, said Darryl Jenkins, a consultant who has given up on the commercial airline industry and now focuses on drones.

Who is to blame, Jenkins asked, if the drone hits a bird, crashes into a building? Who is going to insure the deliveries?

There are also technical questions. Who will recharge the drone batteries? How many deliveries can the machines make before needing service?

"Jeff Bezos might be the single person in the universe who could make something like this happen," Jenkins said. "For what it worth, this is a guy who's totally changed retailing."

The biggest losers could be package delivery services like the U.S. Postal Service, FedEx and UPS.

FedEx spokesman Jess Bunn said in an email: "While we can't speculate about this particular technology, I can say that making every customer experience outstanding is our priority, and anything we do from a technology standpoint will be with that in mind."

Amazon's stock dipped \$1.98, or less than one percent, to \$391.64 in Monday morning's trading.

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