Drones in the newsroom

A guide for developing policy

Share drone policy questions: #uwethics

Identify
Identify varying story types for which drones could be used.

Discuss
Discuss specific public interests served by uses in each of these types, noting the critical difference between what serves the public interest and what is merely interesting to the public.

Plan ahead
Use cases will depend on situations, of course, but healthy advance deliberation will improve decision-making.

Use evidence
Use data provided here to inform these deliberations. For instance, citizens have stronger respect for use of drones in investigative journalism but do not support intrusions into the lives of celebrities or politicians. The news value of "prominence" will almost always be insufficient to justify drone use.

Tell the audience
Produce an "about drone use" section on your website that details the process of getting FAA certification, information about the decision-making process for using a drone to get information or images, and the boundaries the newsroom sets for itself. Regularly promote this information on relevant social channels.

Use caution with third parties
Apply all policy not just to material captured by the organization's drone operators, but also that submitted by all external operators. Avoid using material captured illegally or unethically unless extraordinary circumstances warrant.

Build trust
As trust of the audience grows, support for drone use grows, as well. This is particularly true for more "controversial" news topics. But trust is not a fixed binary – an on/off switch stuck in its current position.

Connect
News organizations interested in communities that support their use of drones should work to build trust with those communities.

Consider this
First Draft News offers a compelling set of activities to work on a "trust toolkit" for journalism.

Use social
Simple steps such as using social channels to inform the public of the dates and reasons for drone flight take an important step toward transparency in the name of building trust.

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Cultivate relationships
The data reveal a clear relationship between evaluations of openness and support for drone use. The more a newsroom cultivates and maintains relationships with the public, the more support it receives for the work it does.

Break down walls
But this call for openness is set against a well-researched reality of journalism ethics as a walled garden tended only by those within newsrooms. We have a history of often keeping the public out of the decisions we make and often failing to tell them why we make them.

Open communication
Establish avenues for the public to suggest story ideas involving drone use.

Look for feedback
Broadcast streaming drone video on such platforms as Facebook Live that allow for instant feedback.

Try Q&A
Offer Q&A sessions where citizens can query the organization's drone team.

Visit community spaces
Visit community groups and events to solicit feedback on drone policies.

Tell your story
Communicate to the audience why the news team made its decisions and the talent or skill involved in producing a news story.

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Find the full report:

ethics.journalism.wisc.

edu/dronejournalism

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