One FAA Rule That Will Impact the Way Businesses Can Use Drones

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The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) recently estimated that there will be 2.7 million Unmanned Aircraft Systems (or drones) used for commercial purposes in the United States by 2020. If that prediction comes true, the number of commercial drones will eclipse manned aircraft by a factor of ten. Who will use drone technology in business? The short answer is that it could be any number of businesses and industries.

Admittedly, adopting drone technology is not the same as upgrading a server or coming up with a new sales strategy. But as the FAA begins to forecast how it will regulate drones operating in the national airspace, a major issue confronting users and prospective users of drones is whether operators must be within visual sight of the operating drone. This potential limitation will have a significant impact on the growth of commercial use of drones.

Perhaps an illustration will explain why. If a rail or utility company wants to inspect its lines for hazards, damage, etc., requiring the operator to stay within line of sight of the drone makes the use of drones much less appealing and possibly not worth the effort. Of course, the opposite is true; if utility company can use drones to inspect miles of power lines without requiring the operator to travel those lines with the drone, using drone technology to perform that function becomes much more appealing. Many speculate that the FAA will require that flying beyond line of sight be done by a licensed pilot. Drawing on my background in military aviation, that seems to be the prudent approach, but we will have to wait a little longer for the FAA to finalize its rules.

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