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If you see a tiny helicopter hovering over a home for sale in South Florida, don't be alarmed. It may be the latest example of drones being used for local businesses.

Coconut Creek-based Above It All Video is using drones, or "aerial photography platforms" to shoot video and still photos for real estate marketing.

Local realtors have already used the drones for selling luxury properties, and the feedback is good from most of them.

"It's an incredible way to showcase larger properties with nice views – like waterfront and golf course homes, said [John O'Flaherty](#), a licensed real estate agent with [Keller Williams](#) in Fort Lauderdale. "At this point, it's unique and it makes people pause and say, 'Wow, I need to check this out.'"

[Roy Caswell](#) owns Above It All Video. He is certified through Minneapolis-based FlySafe, a training program for aerial photography.

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Still, using drones to shoot photos or videos for commercial purposes isn't without risk. Caswell knows that the practice is currently illegal. But he believes he can avoid scrutiny from the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) because he is not charging for the aerial photos themselves. He has further explanation [of his business on his company's website](#) and [on Facebook](#).

"We are a photography service, and we offer land-based photography for a fee. We also charge for editing and producing the aerial photos and videos," Caswell said. "I own the aerial platforms as a hobby only."

Online retailer [Amazon.com](#) recently made headlines by unveiling a plan to deliver packages using aerial drones, but the company acknowledged that regulations currently prohibit such activity.

"We try to avoid using the word drones because it has a negative connotation from the military," Caswell said.

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He uses two remote controlled units. One of them is valued at roughly \$16,000, he said. It carries a high-definition Sony Nex 5 camera.

Fees are \$150 for still photos, \$300 for still photos and a two-minute video, or \$600 for still photos and a video of four to six minutes. That compares to hiring an aerial photography company for up to \$1,100 per hour, Caswell said.

The only other alternative is to embed a Google image in a website, which doesn't offer the same versatility.

The New York Times recently [profiled similar companies operating in the Northeast](#).

Photographer [Raphael Pirker](#) made headlines earlier this year when he protested a \$10,000 fine from the FAA regarding an aerial video he shot at University of Virginia.

Paul Brinkmann covers venture capital, technology, law, energy and environment.

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Federal ban on drones doesn't stop photography

WASHINGTON – Jan. 22, 2014 – Although there is a federal ban on the commercial use of drones, real estate photographers are still using the radio-controlled helicopters to take aerial photos and videos that show the proximity of properties to neighbors, landmarks and amenities.

Kevin Crosse of Arizona Imaging, which launched in 2001, says that real estate photography is becoming a critical component of home marketing – especially at the high end – because nine out of 10 buyers begin their house hunt online.

However, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which plans to issue rules for drones this year, does not allow users of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to sell the video, use it to promote a business or accept payment from another party to shoot videos – but drone owners are allowed to mount cameras and shoot video for their personal use.

Luke Pierzina of Aerial Raiders, who uses a drone to shoot real estate photos, says, “Technically, I can’t charge for any of the flying. I charge for editing.”

While they wait for the FAA to issue rules, real estate photographers and UAV users are keeping a close eye on a lawsuit involving aerial photographer Raphael Pirker, who is challenging the FAA’s jurisdiction in levying a \$10,000 fine for photos shot with a UAV at the University of Virginia in 2011.

Source: Arizona Republic (01/21/14) Corbett, Peter

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