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CNN was a pioneer in round-the-clock cable TV news. Now it wants to pioneer how to use drones in newsgathering—legally.



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The Time Warner Inc. news channel on Monday announced an agreement with the Federal Aviation Administration to study the use of drones for reporting in the U.S. The tests, which will be conducted with Georgia Tech Research Institute, could help the agency shape rules governing news organizations' use of drones as it drafts a wider set of regulations for commercial use of the devices. A handful of companies, including film producers, have gotten waivers from the FAA to use drones for commercial purposes. But the filmmakers, for instance, must notify the FAA three days in advance, only film on a closed set and obtain permission from nearby people.

Such restrictions wouldn't make sense for covering breaking news, said CNN Senior Vice President David Vigilante. The network is proposing a different approach, such as regulations similar to those for helicopters, "so it allows us the flexibility to deal with breaking news," he said. CNN is testing a range of drone types, from the hobbyist models that many people got for Christmas to powerful pieces of machinery that could carry a glass lens camera and transmit high-definition video, he said. The TV network plans to share its findings with the FAA over the next 12 to 24 months.

A group of news organizations, including NBC, is also in talks to research drones for reporting at the Mid-Atlantic test site, one of six FAA-approved sites to test unmanned aircraft in the U.S., according to two people familiar with the project. In countries where drone rules are less restrictive, journalists are already using them to gather news. Drones helped show the scope of recent protests in Thailand and Hong Kong. BBC has used the devices to do some reporting. And last year, CBS News used a drone to explore the contaminated areas around the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. But the U.S. government has been

slow to give companies the green light to fly. The FAA allows the recreational use of drones but has effectively banned commercial use until it completes rules for the devices in the next few years.

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By navigating the regulatory thicket in Washington, CNN could pave a path for other news outlets to use drones legally. Meanwhile, some journalists and local news operations are already starting to use drones without FAA permission. Freelance and citizen journalists across the U.S. have used the devices to film the aftermath of auto wrecks, tornadoes, floods and other events. They often sell the footage to news networks. "Everybody is chomping at the bit" to use drones for reporting, said Mickey Osterreicher, general counsel for the National Press Photographers Association. "And some individuals are doing more than chomping. They're going out and taking their chances."

Brian Emfinger, a cameraman for KATV news station in Little Rock, Ark., used his drone to film the aftermath of a tornado in Arkansas last year. Shortly after, the FAA told KATV his footage violated FAA policy. When new owners recently bought KATV, they instituted a no-drone policy, Mr. Emfinger said. Mr. Emfinger said he began freelancing on the side and selling his drone footage to major TV news organizations, including CNN. On Sunday, for instance, ABC aired his drone footage of a tractor-trailer crash in Arkansas.

An FAA official said that selling drone footage to a news organization makes the drone flight commercial and thus prohibited. Mr. Emfinger said he hasn't heard from the FAA. Matt Waite, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln journalism professor who studies drones, said big U.S. news organizations are hesitant to use drones themselves, but they're often happy to let freelancers take the risk. "The situation is sort of precarious," he said. "What happens if the operator, at the behest of a news organization, crashes and hurts someone and there's a lawsuit?"

The FAA has sent letters to commercial drone users warning them that they are violating its policy—including Mr. Waite and his students. The agency hasn't yet fined any journalists for using drones. Last year, a group of media organizations, including the Associated Press, New York Times and Tribune Co., filed an amicus brief in a case challenging the FAA's legal authority to regulate drones. They complained that the FAA's "overly broad policy" violates the First Amendment and has already had "an impermissible chilling effect" on some journalists' reporting. "The interest in drones in newsrooms from tiny to massive is significant," said Mr. Waite, who consults news organizations on drones. "I've been on conference calls with executives from the largest news organizations to editors of small-town papers and they all want to know: 'How can I do this and when can I do it?'" – *Wall Street Journal*

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The Amazon.com Inc. original series "Transparent" picked up two Golden Globe Awards last night, beating rivals such as HBO and highlighting the progress the online retailer has made as a player in Hollywood. The show, about a retired male professor who identifies as female, won for best TV series, musical or comedy, in a contest that pitted it against programs from HBO, the CW Network and Netflix Inc. Jeffrey Tambor, who plays the main character, also won for best actor in the category. Tambor thanked Amazon and its head of comedy development, Joe Lewis, from the stage during the broadcast on NBC, while the show's creator, Jill Soloway, also acknowledged Amazon founder Jeff Bezos in her acceptance speech.

The awards will likely encourage the Seattle-based e-commerce company and other online entertainment networks to continue investing in original programming. Amazon could make video a stand-alone business instead of a benefit for members of its Prime shipping service, said Victor Anthony, an analyst at Topeka Capital Markets in New York, who rates the stock a buy. "This is a shot in the arm for Amazon's original programming strategy as it validates Amazon as a legitimate programmer in the eyes of Hollywood and on Wall Street," he said in a telephone interview.

The win is a "thrilling dream come true" for the company and those involved in the show,

Roy Price, director of Amazon's studio said in a statement. "We have a big 2015 planned and we are back at work making it happen," he said. Kevin Spacey, who won best actor for his role in "House of Cards," which airs on online streaming service Netflix, said he expects more investment in original content from online providers like Amazon, Netflix and Hulu. "I think that we are going to see in the next decade a lot more stepping forward, particularly companies that have made a gazillion dollars," he said.

Amazon, which introduced Amazon Studios in November 2010, plans to offer seven new shows on Jan. 15, including an hour-long drama from director Ridley Scott that envisions what would happen if the Allies lost World War II and another providing video interpretations of New Yorker magazine stories. In addition, six new shows for kids will be released. The unit, based in Santa Monica, California, is headed by Price, the son of former Columbia Pictures chief Frank Price. The company has sought to differentiate itself from traditional TV networks by soliciting scripts online and asking viewers to vote on whether or not they like the initial episode.

Amazon's original programs are available for online viewing by customers of its Prime service, which costs \$99 a year and also includes free, two-day shipping on products available on the website. The e-commerce company doesn't disclose how many customers pay for Prime. Analyst estimates range from 20 to 35 million, though many of those may not produce revenue because Amazon offers free membership promotions. Last month the company said tens of million customers had "tried" Prime over holidays.

Amazon's strategy follows that of HBO and Netflix, which have both invested in original programming to increase subscriptions to their video services. "Netflix and HBO have both proven that original content can absolutely drive demand, if that content is compelling," said Sucharita Mulpuru, analyst at Forrester Research in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "Amazon seems to have hired great talent and they are taking a page from that same playbook." Amazon doesn't release numbers on its programming investment and analysts question whether it will ultimately be profitable. Netflix, which has more than 53 million subscribers worldwide, has struggled to deliver stable earnings.

Amazon's approach differs somewhat from rivals in that it funds show development on its own, rather than seeking partners to limit exposure, according to Michael Pachter, analyst at Wedbush Securities in Los Angeles, who estimates the company spent \$200 million on original programming last year. "Amazon has taken a lot of risk, and has funded all of its originals," Pachter said. "Amazon has only 'Transparent' to show for its efforts, with the rest of its originals flying below the radar. I think Netflix's strategy makes more business sense."

The company's strategy of only funding one episode of a new program could alienate some Hollywood talent looking for longer-term commitments, but for now many seem eager to work with Amazon. Ben Silverman, the independent producer whose CW show "Jane the Virgin" lost to "Transparent" last night, said he expects to start shooting "Casanova," an historical drama for Amazon this year. Gina Rodriguez won best actress in a TV comedy or musical for "Jane the Virgin." Amazon is committing to "tons" of shows, many of them based on edgy topics, such as "Transparent," Silverman said. "They're in," he said. Amazon fell 1.9 percent to \$291.41 at the close in New York. The stock lost 22 percent in 2014. – **Bloomberg**



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