

Graduate Spotlight Series – Joe Polillio

an insight into a UVU graduate's journey in the drone industry



1. Which program did you study here at Unmanned Vehicle University?

- a. I went through the UAV Pilot Training Program in the spring of 2015.

2. Are you working as a freelance operator, own your own company, or work full time for a company within the unmanned systems industry? Is your day-to-day work related to your studies at UVU?

- a. I already had a LLC as a professional photographer, but I did start a new company after my training with UVU.
b. The drone service providing company is called AEROJO drone productions.
c. This is an LLC but I am a "one man shop" and the work environment is closely related to that of a freelance operator.
d. I went to UVU because I was already a professional photographer and knew that if I was going to get into the drone space I wanted to build off that base and develop professional standards and practices as a drone operator.
e. My instructor, Mike Ferguson, was excellent. He was instrumental in helping me develop professional standards as a drone operator just getting started. He also made himself available to me after training for any questions I had – further helping me develop my drone service providing business in its infancy.

3. Could you provide an overview of the type of work you do?

Are you a service provider, consultant, manufacturer etc.?

- a. I am purely a service provider within the drone industry.
b. I got into drones to augment my traditional photography work, which took a massive hit due to technology advancements and royalty-free photos available all over the internet.
c. Drone technology provided me with a new opportunity to capture professional grade photo and video content in ways not possible through the medium of traditional photography.
d. I wanted to treat the drone as a professional grade camera system in the air.

4. What types of customer verticals do you, or your company, service?

- a. At first I set out to, and succeeded in landing, work with my traditional customer base-video production companies. Drone operators were in high demand when I first started out and these production companies hire me for a variety of jobs.
b. As a professional aerial photographer and videographer I get hired by Realtors, advertising agencies, video production companies, commercial and residential real estate developers.
c. I have also captured data and content with my drone for companies using 2D mapping and 3D modelling technology for mostly land or real estate development applications.

5. Please highlight the major challenges you faced while getting started working in this industry. These could be either individual or industry related challenges. How did you overcome these challenges?

- a. I started off in this industry before the current regulations were in place. I needed to go to flight school and train on manned aircraft to get my 333 exemption.
b. I did obtain my 333 exemption; however, I never operated under it. At that same time the new part 107 regulations were released by the FAA and I took the knowledge exam on the first day it was available.
c. These new regulations flooded the market with people who passed exam but did not have real professional photography experience, or any type of professional drone flight training.
d. At this point I knew I needed to differentiate myself as a highly trained professional photographer, and drone operator, in order to win more business.

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Side Summary Topics

Student Name

Joe Polillio

Company name

AEROJO Productions

Program of Study at UVU

UAV Pilot Training Program

Location

Denville, New Jersey

Verticals served

- Real Estate Marketing
- Real Estate Development
- High level Video production
- Industrial marketing projects
- Mapping

Summary

Joe Polillio is a New Jersey based professional photographer who went through Unmanned Vehicle University's UAV pilot training program in 2015.

Joe was one of the first people in the US to take and pass his FAA knowledge exam under the new part 107 regulations.

Joe has been able to utilize his professional drone training in order to attract clients across video production, real estate, and mapping/construction projects.

Joe has also been able to augment his traditional photography business by way of his drone service providing business.

Joe has worked on a large number of interesting and diverse projects as a drone operator that has taken him across the US and abroad!



- e. I created a beautiful website which showcased my professional grade photography and video content. I win business because I direct potential clients to my website where they can vet the professionalism and quality of the content I produce.
- f. This helps tremendously in winning business against competitors who may have little to no training and have just passed the 107 exam and purchased a drone.

6. Please provide an overview of specific successes you have had in this industry, please also highlight any interesting, exciting, or unique projects you have had an opportunity to work on.

- a. A company that does 3D rendering hired me to take drone shots of Jersey City and they inserted buildings that a developer will be building there.
- b. I was hired by a Florida based company that creates machinery used to clean and restore beaches after natural disasters 6 times faster than anything else on the market. I was hired to be onsite taking pictures and videos with my drone as this machine was on Jersey Shore performing restoration after a hurricane. It was an incredible experience to not only be onsite watching this machine in action, but also flying my drone and capturing great footage of the machine in action! I then processed all of the content and created an excellent marketing tool for this company, which led in a quantifiable increase in their business.
- c. I was hired to capture video and photo content with my drone for the Phipps estate listing. This is the estate originally built by Howard Phipps, a business partner of Andrew Carnegie. The main house is over 16,000 square feet and the estate sits on 93 acres, so it was a very unique and challenging experience!

7. What are your plans for your career moving forward in the unmanned systems industry? How do you see yourself adapting with the emergence of new technologies, regulations, etc.?

- a. In general I am trending towards moving away from the traditional realtor as a client base. I was recently hired by an ad agency to go all over the southern US to shoot commercial properties for a pharmaceutical client. This client has hundreds of millions dollars' worth of property that he will be shooting.
- b. I am working with an advertising agency that is subbing out the drone work for this large client. The ad agencies ability to sell my higher priced services, and the pharmaceutical client's willingness to pay for it, marks a significant trend in the overall thought process and attitude towards higher priced professionals in the drone industry.
- c. I sell them on the aspect of professionalism; I am highly trained, I have aviation insurance, I do not charge the lowest possible price, as the drone operator I try educating my potential clients on the perils of hiring someone who just bought a drone, passed the 107 exam, and has no real flight training credentials.
- d. Speaking in regards to regulations, being close to New York City does pose challenges because it is a no-fly zone. I have plenty of potential clients who inquire about drone jobs in NYC and I have to turn them down and inform them of the rules and regulations. These potential clients are not usually happy or understanding of these policies. Part of my job is also educating potential clients on what is possible and not possible to accomplish with drones, which will hopefully provide benefit for everyone in the industry moving forward.

8. Upon reflecting on the aforementioned information, please provide a detailed overview of how Unmanned Vehicle University prepared you for a career in the unmanned systems industry.

- a. I highly recommend professional training- it gave me the confidence needed when on the job site, especially when I was just starting out with my drone services.
- b. Training is an invaluable resource which greatly prepared me to be out in the field – HELPS THE MOST WHEN THE UNEXPECTED ARISES(which happens quite a bit)
- c. In spending time with a professional instructor you experience things you can't learn from YouTube videos or written manuals. Nothing can substitute for the 1-on-1 experience I had with my UVU flight instructor.
- d. Training helps you recognize that putting something like a drone in the air is a very serious proposition with various risks associated. Training helps not only the understanding of those risks, but also with techniques on how to identify and mitigate said risks.
- e. Overall this has been a great journey, which has required a lot of hard work, and it started with training at Unmanned Vehicle University!
- f. Please visit my website to see how professional grade training and experience can truly lead to a higher quality product: <https://www.aerojo.com/>

