

## How Launching a Drone Program Can Elevate Safety and Productivity

Written by: Matthew Thibault, Reporter, Construction Dive

Poettker Construction, located in Breese, Illinois, uses its drones as a “jack of all trades” tool, according to the company’s in-house operator. Inspection, marketing, photography, and safety all fit neatly into Poettker’s drone program, which the builder announced in February.

Already, people on the ground and in the front office are seeing it pay dividends.

Here, Charles Wilson, Poettker’s vice president of risk management, and Logan Decker, who runs the drone program, talk with Construction Dive about its origins, how the firm overcame hurdles, and advice for builders curious about drones.

### HOW DID THE DRONE PROGRAM AT POETTKER START?

**Charles Wilson:** Utilizing outside resources can be costly, and at some point in time, there’s a return on investment if you were to invest in your own drone equipment and own operator. Plus, there’s an advantage to having control over the data and being able to do more with the data that you’re collecting.

When the decision came to whether or not we wanted to have a drone and drone operator in-house, it really was a no brainer for us.

We decided that we wanted this to live within our risk management department, because we felt like the equipment had the opportunity to drive down our rework and also promote the workmanship that’s being put in place out there,



and overall, make people safer.

When we sat back and we analyzed that internally, we also realized that we were able to support other initiatives and how we execute them, those being safety, quality, and production.

### HOW DO YOU DEPLOY THE TECHNOLOGY IN THOSE AREAS?

**Wilson:** With safety, we can perform inspections of elevated positions without having to have a physical person access the work. We are able to inspect our project sites and identify hazards from the air.

With quality, we can fly our projects and have our quality staff review the footage of definable features of work. This allows

our staff to cover more of our projects at once while still reviewing the quality of work being put in place in near to real time.

There's also the marketing aspect, which is primarily what we're using the photography for.

### WHAT WAS IT LIKE IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM ON THE JOBSITE?

**Logan Decker:** Whenever you implement technology to oversee safety and quality, and all these different things that we use it for, you tend to get a little pushback, but it's been pretty good so far.

We're trying to get people to know that it's there for their use whenever they need it. It doesn't always come to everyone's mind at first. Normally, they're going to go to what they've relied on over the past few years or even longer, until we can drive home that the drone is here for your use and your position, whatever that may be. Then it's just slowly and steadily growing the number of flights and the frequency.

**Wilson:** I think one thing that could be very easy to run into, especially when you start a program like this, is you don't know what you don't know. Logan started back in June, so we're not even a year into having this program going, but there is a lot of buzz out there.

I think we may not have anticipated it taking off as fast as it did. We actually had to come up with our own scheduling solution to ensure that everybody's getting the service that they require in a timely manner.

We have to remind ourselves too, because the equipment is so robust and it does have such a benefit that we don't want to oversell ourselves because we're still learning it. We're still learning not only the equipment, but the capabilities and perfecting that.

And at times, we have to remind ourselves that we are a construction company that has drones. We're not a drone company that happens to do construction.

### IF YOU WERE STARTING THIS PROGRAM AGAIN, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?


**Wilson:** When it comes to technology, it moves fast, and it changes fast. I would say there's multiple times as we've been

going through this process that we've tried something and we had to tweak it or change it. It's a part of adapting and overcoming.

Some advice that I would give somebody is, understand your company's needs and your client's needs, and establish buy-in with your stakeholders.

I think it was pretty pivotal for us when we purchased the equipment, we also purchased training on the equipment. They actually sent out the instructor and did physical training here at our facility with Logan, and that was really critical for us to understand not only the capabilities of equipment, but the capabilities of Logan and actually see our money that we spent in use.

**Decker:** I would keep up with any changes to the drone software. They're constantly updating. I don't know how many times it's happened, where I'll have an updated drone go out to the field, get ready to fly, and then another update is pushed.

Making sure that we're staying up on that and how they function, and how they can give us better information or allow us to process information more efficiently – the more you stay on top of that stuff, the better product it's going to spit out to you and your team members, and then your customers and stakeholders. 



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### About the Author

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