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Formally known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or UAV, drones come in many shapes and have many different features. Nowadays, there are fixed-wing and rotary wing drones; drones that use batteries, gasoline, solar power and even hydrogen fuel cells; and drones that fly within close range to the operator or miles away from the control centre. Similarly, drone prices vary greatly: in the market they range from US\$ 100 for a basic quadcopter with camera to up to US\$ 20 million for a MQ-9 Reaper - used by the USA Army in intelligence activities and military interventions.

Although drones were first utilised by the military sector, which continues to account for the largest amount of absolute investment and development, the last decade has witnessed a boom in the use and commercialisation of simpler and smaller models, both for recreational and commercial purposes. Therefore, ProMéxico decided to conduct a study in order to better understand the potential applications of drones in service provision as well as what Mexico can do to make a place for itself in this booming industry.

SOME OF THE KEY FINDINGS ARE:

1. Drones should not be considered only as finished products; instead, they are adaptable tools that can be used to provide services such as three-dimensional land mapping, construction site inspection, and even pest control and crop fertilisation.
2. These tasks can be carried out by means of specialised drones or, even, commercial ones available from US\$ 1,000 upwards. The latter can be augmented with accessories suitable for the type of task in hand.
3. These accessories or components may even be developed by companies other than the drone manufacturer and range from infrared cameras and other types of sensors to programmes or applications used to automatize flight paths or image recording.
4. Besides programmes and physical components, drones also require support institutions, which must act as facilitators and help to minimise risks related to drone use. These support institutions include training schools, regulatory bodies, and more.

In Mexico, there are companies that have proven their capacity to join the global drone market. However, the country can develop these capacities further, creating opportunities in areas such as software and hardware development for the most commonly used models, specialized equipment manufacturing, and service provision geared towards integrating the country into global value chains.