

Data-driven audience targeting expands to drone tests in LA

February 24 2015, by Nancy Owano



(Phys.org) —"Experimenting With Drones For Data Collection." This is the sort of headline that could set off alarm bells in the minds of privacy proponents worried about the potential limits and freedoms of drones for eavesdropping, but that indeed was the headline earlier this month on the AdNear Blog.

AdNear is a Singapore-based data company backed by investments from Canaan Partners and Sequoia Capital. They perform global location data powered by a geo-location platform. They said they can translate user location without the need of GPS or operator assistance. They analyze

the location data. They said they believe historical [location data](#) combined with content behavior present powerful audience insights for intelligent ad targeting across mobile devices. They have operations in Singapore, India, Australia, Indonesia and the U.S. "Today we started [initial](#) tests with drones to collect data. And the results have been fantastic!" they blogged on February 4.

The goal is efficiently collecting wireless data supporting audience-profiling data. According to the company blog, AdNear has been using bikes, cars, trains, and even walking up the stairs to collect data including Wi-Fi and cell tower signals, helping toward precise device location. Their ad-tech infrastructure is now expanding to drones. For brands, they said, this would mean more data points for accurate audiences and more location points for consumer insights and targeting. When the tests are complete, they said they plan to use drones in select geographies. The blog did include an all-important note about privacy: "Privacy and legal compliance are of highest [importance](#) to us. Just to keep the record straight; we only collect signals passively and do not record videos or photos. And there is no PII involved either." Frank Bi of *Forbes* reported Monday that the company used a fleet of consumer [drones](#) in Los Angeles. They were able to determine "a cell phone's location as well as its movement by collecting signal strength and other wireless data from passersby below." Writing in *VentureBeat*, Barry Levine similarly said the capture was using "signal strength, [cell tower](#) triangulation, and other indicators to determine where the device is, and that information is then used to map the user's travel patterns."

The idea is to deliver targeted ads and other promotions to pedestrians as they walk past a storefront, as incentive to enter the store. Bi said the test began earlier this month in the San Fernando [Valley](#) of Los Angeles and with the possibility of more testing in Asia. For the experiment, the company said it collected only data with no personally identifiable information, according to *Forbes*. In *VentureBeat*, Levine also reported

that the company said "no name, phone number, router ID, or other personally identifiable [information](#) is captured, and there is no photography or video." Levine quoted the company's director of marketing and research, Smriti Kataria, saying "capturing photos [via drone] is something which is scary, and that's not right." She added that AdNear had "no need" for photos or videos.

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