

Dronedesk case study

QUARRYING, MINING, EXPLOSIVES AND DEMOLITION

How how Daniel Richards is using Dronedesk to manage over 40 drone pilots for **EPC-UK**



10 min read

Imagine sitting down to track over 40 pilots, conducting 1,200 flights across 100 locations in a spreadsheet.

Time-consuming. Frustrating. Beyond difficult. And all too easy to misplace key documents or data needed to demonstrate your compliance to the CAA.

This was the challenge facing Dan Richards. Dan is Senior Explosives Engineer for EPC-UK as well as looking after the business' drone operators. But his old system of spreadsheets and Sharepoint was taking too much time. And with the number of drone operators rapidly increasing, Dan was facing the prospect of hiring someone to manage the drone operations, or giving up his other responsibilities and living in his spreadsheets full-time.

Thankfully, Dan didn't need to do either. In fact, he was able to look after more pilots in *less time*.

Because he discovered Dronedesk.

What is EPC-UK?

EPC-UK is part of the EPC Groupe, one of the world's leaders in explosives, demolition and drilling and blasting. It first began operating in the UK in 1905 and has since become a trusted and respected supplier of explosives for commercial applications.



EPC-UK uses drones to gather data for designing explosive blasts, as well as mapping entire quarries. Using drones means EPC-UK can gather more detailed data than before, creating 3D models for quarries that improve safety as well as ensuring every blast is properly designed and tailored for the site requirements.

With its services in such demand, EPC-UK has needed more and more drone operators, as well as training some of its existing specialists to fly drones too. This left Dan with a rapidly growing number of operators, a rapidly growing fleet of drones, and a rapidly growing number of flights. All of which came with paperwork, planning, and compliance requirements.



"We'd been trying to manage it in-house in quite a basic way using spreadsheets. And that's fine when you've got two to five drones. But once your pilot numbers and your drone numbers start going up, you need a better way of doing it."

In Dan's case, that better way was Dronedesk.

Finding the perfect balance

When you're managing a large team of drone operators conducting a huge number of flights, you've already got a lot of data to wrangle. You need all that data in one place, easy to access, and unburden by data you just don't need.

Dan found that this wasn't as easy as it sounds when he started looking at drone operations management platforms. He quickly found that, although there were lots of options, he didn't have many choices.



"None of the other platforms really matched what we wanted. The enterprise platforms were vast, cost huge amounts of money, and captured much more data than we needed. And the smaller platforms didn't capture enough. It was really finding that middle ground, tailored to what we wanted."

But when he discovered Dronedesk, he'd found the balance he needed. He had everything he needed, from pilot data such as certifications and flight hours to flight logs, asset management to risk assessments for each flight (along with any incident reports). But he wasn't drowning in live flight updates either.



"I had a checklist of what I wanted, and the Dronedesk demo showed it to be a great fit."



Improving safety and compliance

Of course, system changes aren't always greeted with open arms. And there's no bigger headache than when some people don't engage with the new system, won't use it properly, or refuse to use it at all! Thankfully, Dan didn't have that problem.



"It was easy to get everyone's buy-in because I did a demo for them. They saw they didn't have to go through spreadsheets again and again. They didn't have to replicate a lot of work from previous jobs. It was easy and user-friendly."

And getting his team's buy-in was crucial to Dan, because a number of them weren't full-time drone operators. In fact, drone operations were just a small part of their job. But they still needed to plan their flights to the same degree and standard as a full-time drone operator. And with such an emphasis on safety and compliance, Dan needed them as engaged as possible.



"Safety underpins everything we do, especially with what we're working with. An incident could knock a customer's confidence in what we're doing or in drones in general. So it's ingrained into our culture that safety is first. Nothing, nothing beats that. And the easier we can make the process for our drone operators, the better our safety and compliance will be. And that's exactly what we've seen. Working with Dronedesk, we've maintained the high level of interaction from our pilots even as their numbers have dramatically increased."

And speaking of safety, Dan was also keen to find an operations management tool that could help keep the drones safe too. Dronedesk holds all the details about the individual drones you're using, from flight hours to battery data to maintenance schedules. It was this last feature that got Dan's interest.



"We fly drones in quite unpleasant conditions, mainly because of the dust. That dust can kill our drones. So we tend to replace them very early. And Dronedesk has helped with that replacement schedule."

So, impressed by what he saw, Dan implemented a small-scale trial with a few operators to establish workflows. Then, in January 2024, he made the switch across the entire team.

And he didn't look back.

Growing with Dronedesk



"It was a relief to get off our old system and onto Dronedesk."

Switching to any new system can be nerve-wracking, but Dan's implementation was smooth. Making full use of his trial period certainly helped as it meant Dan could be certain how the system worked. It also meant he could prepare in-house training so it didn't take much time to train his team on the new system.



"The training lasts about an hour. I do an hour on Teams, and I've created video walk-throughs of our specific workflow. There's also a link on the platform that takes you to videos Dorian has put in there specific to that section where you've asked for help. So, yeah, it's quite easy."

And between January and July 2024, Dan was able to grow his team from 20 operators to 43. Thanks, in part, to Dronedesk.



"Without Dronedesk, we would have had to handle that growth in a different way. It would have taken up more and more time until we had to hire someone just to manage it all. But Dronedesk has enabled me to still carry out my main role whilst ensuring there is no compromise in terms of the compliance, the quality, the safety."

Now Dan has everything he needs in one place, it's a matter of moments to check whether any drones need maintenance, whether all the insurance is up to date, if everyone is flying the right number of hours, and if EPC-UK's drone operations are ship-shape and compliant.



"It's made my life a lot easier. I've got all my data in one place, in a very logical way. I'm not diving around through folders, trying maintain certain files that the CAA might want to see."

A service to fly for

Dan has also been impressed with the service he's received from Dronedesk. We always pride ourselves on listening to customer feedback, but our founder, Dorian, really impressed Dan.



"I noticed some of our team was missing the last step of completing a job because the button was at the top, so I messaged Dorian and said 'would you be able to put a button at the bottom too?' And within maybe 30 minutes there was a button there. I was really happy with that."

Dan has seen how much the drone space has changed in just a few years, and he knows it will continue to change. That means new requirements placed on his team, and will also demand changes in drone operations. But he's not worried that his operations management platform won't keep up.



"The ongoing development is key to the success of the platform. The drone space is constantly changing and evolving, so seeing that Dronedesk is keeping up with that is very reassuring."

Confidence restored



"Dronedesk has been a big time saver. It allows me to relax slightly. I'm not having to check every 20 minutes to make sure things are being uploaded. It buys you a little confidence and relaxation in the role."

There are so many drone fleet managers who are grappling with data, records, and compliance with systems that just aren't built for the job. Whether it's all in a series of unwieldy spreadsheets, files scattered across apps and folders, or just stacks of paper, we've seen it all. More importantly, we've used some of it ourselves, which is why our founder, Dorian, built Dronedesk in the first place.

And we're especially pleased to hear that Dronedesk has made Dan more confident in his compliance!

Do you want to feel more relaxed and confident in your drone operations? Then give Dronedesk a try and start your 14-day free trial today.

All quotes are from Daniel Richards - Senior Explosives Engineer and Drone Fleet Manager



Daniel Richards

Try Dronedesk FREE with a 90-day 100% money back guarantee that you'll save time with your flight planning.