

Facebook's Drones Get Closer

Written by Nick Graves
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Facebook's project to deliver internet services via a fleet of high altitude drones has moved a step closer, acquiring both a name and a speculative timeline.

The name (or probably codename) is Aquila, appropriate in being both Latin and Italian for eagle. The timescale, according to the New York Times, will see the first flights this summer, with commercial deployment over the coming years.

Facebook, Google and SpaceX are all exploring alternative approaches to delivering internet services to remote regions of the world. Google has experimented with its Loons (high-altitude balloons), and has purchased a low-orbital satellite company. SpaceX has announced plans to launch its own fleet of internet satellites.

The Facebook approach would seem the most viable, in many ways. The Aquila solar-powered drones would fly at around 20,000 to 30,000m, above commercial flight paths, and would remain airborne for months at a time. While they would be much cheaper to launch than a satellite, and can be brought down for maintenance, there would need to be many more of them to achieve full coverage than the rather higher satellites. They may also face airspace regulatory challenges.

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In every case, while the stated goals are to bring internet access to under-developed regions of the world, it seems likely that there is an unstated agenda to compete with the monopolistic Telcos in the longer term. Each of these approaches can transcend borders, bringing a single service to disparate regions such as Europe, and disrupting the current fragmented market.

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[Go Facebook Looks to the Skies](#)

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