

An Interview with Nixie Labs

Nixie Labs, Inc. is an American company based in Silicon Valley in California. The team of scientists and engineers at Nixie Labs is developing the world's first small, wearable camera drone. In this interview, a computer scientist from Nixie Labs explains the project.

Floris Ernst is a computer scientist working on the Nixie drone's flight control systems. We asked him about the project and his work...

What are you making?

'I'm helping to create Nixie, a wearable camera drone. Nixie will be portable, automatic and help take spectacular pictures outdoors by automatically framing the user. I am working on the motion sensors and algorithms to make Nixie fly smoothly and accurately.'

5 How did the Nixie project start?

'Christoph, the inventor of Nixie, was inspired by the idea of a drone to help take photos of exciting outdoor sports like rock climbing. It's really hard to handle a camera while hanging on to a cliff, but there's potential for great pictures. Nixie could open up the sky to amateur photographers.'

10 What makes this drone different?

'Nixie is wearable! That makes it easy to transport and use anywhere. Most camera drones are bulky and slow to set up, and require a dedicated pilot or GPS-mapped flight plan. Nixie does one thing: take pictures of its owner. By automating this, we can refine the design so anyone can use it confidently.'

15 Is it safe for people to use drones?

'We're thinking a lot about safety. Automating its flight reduces pilot error. Nixie is small and light so it won't do major damage even if it crashes. But people will still need to think carefully and be considerate to others before they launch a Nixie. I personally don't like the idea of drones flying around and peeking into every hole.'

20 How will Nixie be used?

'We think Nixie will suit outdoor sportspeople, like rock climbers. But we've spoken to people in firefighting, where a cheap, quick drone to help them see a new high angle of a dangerous situation could help them a lot. Wearing a Nixie might also help locate people in alpine rescue or other emergency situations.'

25 What's next for the Nixie project?

'There's a lot of work to do! We need to work out the best shape to make Nixie a user-friendly wearable device. We're experimenting with how to control Nixie, such as with smartphones or gestures. And we need to improve how accurately Nixie can return to its owner once it's taken its pictures. It will be a busy year.'

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