



STRATASYS UNVEILS 3D-PRINTED UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLE

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Advancements in **3D printing** technologies that have helped the aerospace industry to save time and money were on display at the Dubai Airshow yesterday.

Nasdaq-listed **Stratasys** unveiled the largest **3D printed unmanned aerial vehicle** (UAV), which it said was built in half the time it would have taken using conventional manufacturing.

For the first time, this year's event features a dedicated 3D print pavilion – 3D Printshow Dubai – showcasing the latest developments in the sector.

Stratasys, known for its 3D printing and additive manufacturing technology, teamed up with the Virginia-based aerospace company Aurora Flight Sciences to build the UAV.

Capable of more than 240 kilometres per hour, the 3-metre wingspan aircraft weighs just 15 kilograms, thanks in part to 3D printing techniques used for 80 per cent of its manufacture.

“This is a perfect demonstration of the unique capabilities that additive manufacturing can bring to aerospace,” said Scott Sevcik, the business development manager at Stratasys.

Additive manufacturing is a process by which 3D design data is used to make a part by depositing successive layers of material to build up the component, and companies in aerospace and defence have been quick to leverage the technology.

Rolls-Royce, GE, Boeing and Airbus are already using the technology to make parts.

Airbus used more than 1,000 parts on the wide-body A350 aircraft in place of traditionally manufactured parts, helping it to reduce costs and save production time, while GE is testing and developing engines with 3D printed parts.

A report this month from the US market research firm ReportLinker said that global revenue for additive manufacturing in aerospace and defence would reach US\$920 million this year with strong growth expected up to 2025.

Jay Shelby, the applications engineer at Stratasys, said that the industry is projected to expand by about \$20 billion in the next five years.

The consultancy PwC said 3D printing is emerging as a viable fabrication process that can be used to build prototypes and small-volume production.

ReportLinker, however, tempered that optimism. It said that some issues facing the sector that need to be addressed include quality control, regulations and limitations to the current technology. The research firm did not specify the steps that need to be undertaken.

PwC said that “if 3D printing remains confined to prototypes, demo units and spacecraft, then it won’t be much of a game-changer for industry”, adding that the biggest hurdle to mass production is processing speed.

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