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SkySpecs: A New Horizon for Wind Energy

Danny Ellis, chief executive officer and co-founder of SkySpecs,ⁱ looked out his window at downtown Ann Arbor, Michigan, and reflected on the past nine years. Since 2012, SkySpecs had grown from a drone project created by three engineering students at the University of Michigan into a leading wind turbine inspection company—and one of the few that used autonomous drones and proprietary software to analyze and optimize wind energy turbine operations.

In the past decade, compared to other drone companies, the success of SkySpecs had been somewhat of an anomaly. Ellis attributed this sustained growth to a laser-like focus on wind turbine blade inspections: “From what I have seen in drones, the successful companies have focused on a very singular problem. The [drone] companies that have focused on multiple problems have almost entirely gone out of business and burned hundreds of millions of dollars...By 2017, [investors] were not lending to drone companies anymore. Our focus on wind energy was part of our effort to separate ourselves from the drone space and shift our focus to optimizing wind farms. [Wind energy] has been our sole focus, and we have little interest in moving outside of renewable energy.”¹

While Ellis believed that the reason for such success could be attributed to SkySpecs’ niche approach, he had been receiving an increasing number of requests from clients for SkySpecs to offer expanded solutions such as inspecting other turbine components and securing maintenance and repairs for damaged turbine parts. Furthermore, Ellis wondered if there was an opportunity for SkySpecs to apply its autonomous drone technology and analytics software platform to other industry verticals. If so, he would need to build his case and present it to SkySpecs’ board members at their upcoming meeting.

The Wind Energy Ecosystem

Wind had become one of the most promising renewable energy sources in the United States. From 2015 to 2020, the wind energy industry had grown by an average of 10.3% annually with total industry revenue

ⁱ <https://skyspecs.com/>

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