

Orlando Sentinel

Racing drones store and practice facility takes off in Altamonte Springs

When Mario Pino and his son Marc went to CES in Las Vegas earlier this year, they were looking for the next big technology that would make for a good business idea. They landed on a concept that seems to be taking off – racing drones.

After the convention and establishing a relationship with the drone company UVify, they came back and got to work. Six months later, Top Dronz opened its doors.

Mario didn't want to have a store that just sold drones, but a facility for drone beginners to learn and enthusiasts to practice. Marc was on the same page.

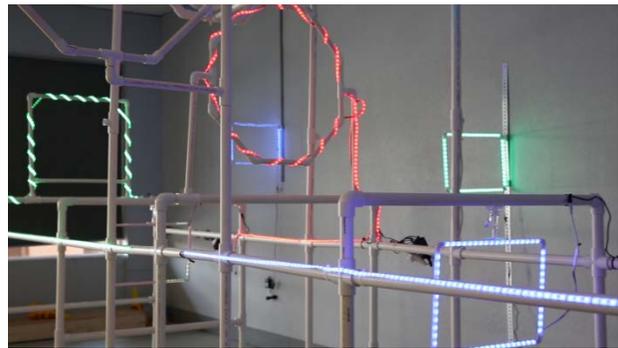
"We saw that there's no one actually helping to train pilots," Marc said. "We came up with an idea for a training facility."

After doing some homework, Mario realized that there aren't any established drone stores to franchise currently. He also figured out that most places don't offer both the opportunity to buy and to how to fly in the same space.

"There really isn't any organized, nationwide, franchisable business," Mario said. "When we really looked at the business, we said - how do we go beyond the sale of the product? How do we not only sell the product, but support it and have the parts for it."

The concept was designed so that anybody can walk in and learn how to fly for the first time. The "basic training" package for \$25 gives users one hour of training on the flight simulator and their first flights, with coaching included.

What sets racing drones apart is the change in perspective while flying. Pilots wear first-person view goggles and watch where they're flying



The indoor practice track, which will change monthly, at Top Dronz in Altamonte Springs.



Matt Pino practices on drone flying simulator software at Top Dronz.

through a camera mounted to the drone.

"You are seeing the world from a whole new perspective," Mario said. "As if you're in the drone flying around."

Those looking to try drone racing can enter the sport for around \$300. After practicing and renting gear at Top Dronz, you can buy a Tiny Whoop for \$155. The lower-tier controller and goggles are \$69 each.

The UVify drones cost \$389 and \$799.

In the future, Mario hopes to work with schools and community groups to introduce drone racing to more people. He also hopes that Top Dronz can prove to be viable as a franchise opportunity for other drone enthusiasts and business owners.

"If we end up being a Wendy's in three years or two years, I'm ok with that," Mario said.

Top Dronz has more Central Florida locations planned.

The Altamonte Springs Top Dronz (801 W. State Road 436, Suite 1025) is open Monday — Wednesday 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., Thursday 2 p.m. to 1 a.m., Friday 2 p.m. to 30 minutes before sundown, Saturday 30 minutes after sundown to 1 a.m., and Sunday 2 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The store is available for birthday parties, field trips and corporate events. More information can be found [here](#).



A look through first-person view goggles at Top Dronz.



Marc Pino flies a Tiny Whoop drone around the Top Dronz store in Altamonte Springs.