

SPRING 2020

# EVA

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VISTAJET & VISTA GLOBAL HOLDING  
IAN MOORE, CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER  
GLOBALLY LOCAL

Trijets, Trips & Twins Too: Planet Nine Private Air – Matt Walter, Director of Business Development  
A Passion for Creation: MSB Design – Jean-François Thibault, Sales Director  
Passion & Positive Difference: Clay Lacy Aviation – Scott Cutshall, SVP Business Operations

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# Editor's Comments

## Industry Leaders Driving Sustainability

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Tel: +44 (0) 20 8253 4000  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 8603 7369

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Address changes and subscriptions:  
[charlotte@evaint.com](mailto:charlotte@evaint.com)

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As this edition was readied for press, global business aviation executives met in London for the Corporate Jet Investor conference, where sustainability drove the agenda.

Meanwhile, the British Business and General Aviation Association was finalising plans for its annual conference on 5 March, with sustainability its theme.

It seems sustainability is becoming an industry watchword, not only because business aviation must become sustainable to survive, but because it is the only sensible course of action for our future.

Two of the high-profile interviewees in this Spring 2020 edition of EVA revealed that their companies were preparing major sustainability announcements; in both cases those announcements came too late in the editorial process for inclusion in the articles, so the opportunity is taken here to showcase their intentions.

On 10 February, Clay Lacy Aviation announced the engagement of World Kinect Energy Services, a subsidiary of World Fuel Services Corporation, to assist it in developing a 'comprehensive sustainability program' aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of Clay Lacy facilities and offering the company's clients a simpler way to purchase carbon credits to offset their flying.

Significantly, Brian Kirkdoffer, President and CEO, Clay Lacy Aviation, said: "Reducing our carbon footprint and offering clients an easy, verifiable way to operate their planes sustainably is simply the right thing to do." Initial projects may include installing a solar array, eliminating single-use plastics, transitioning from diesel to electric ground equipment and upgrading to LED lighting. Looking further ahead, Clay Lacy is considering how it might provide sustainable jet fuel as supply becomes available, prepare for electric and alternative-fuel aircraft, and install additional electric vehicle charging stations. It expects its Van Nuys FBO to

be among the first in the US to offer Gold Standard carbon offsets bundled with fuel purchases.

Noting Clay Lacy Aviation's history of business aviation leadership, Paul Vian, Senior Vice President, World Kinect Energy Services, noted: "...this innovative, multi-dimensional programme may serve as a viable model for other business aviation companies to follow." More or less simultaneously, VistaJet revealed details of its sustainability programme, pledging to "... give the climate crisis the attention it deserves". The company has already worked hard to eliminate single-use products from its cabins, while the full programme also provides the opportunity for clients to invest in certified carbon credits, reducing emissions and supporting projects in countries to which VistaJet flies.

VistaJet also asks its clients to do more than offset the emissions created by their flying, through simple changes of behaviour. Booking flights early enables optimal flight planning, reducing fuel consumption, while it also notes that accepting a road journey to a nearby airport can have a decisive effect on reducing the emissions that result from short flights – it's a policy that last year enabled VistaJet to reduce its movements between London airports by 20%, saving many tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.



**Paul E Eden**

Editor  
[paul@evaint.com](mailto:paul@evaint.com)

**James Sheridan**  
Chairman  
[james@evaint.com](mailto:james@evaint.com)

**Lélia Martin**  
EMEA Sales Director  
[lelia@evaint.com](mailto:lelia@evaint.com)

**Charlotte Willis**  
Office Manager  
[charlotte@evaint.com](mailto:charlotte@evaint.com)

**Parveen Raja**  
Publisher  
[parveen@evaint.com](mailto:parveen@evaint.com)

**Ian Tavener**  
Sales Manager  
[Tavener@evaint.com](mailto:Tavener@evaint.com)

**Jordan Newton**  
Graphic Designer  
[jordan@evaint.com](mailto:jordan@evaint.com)

**Shobhana Patel**  
Head of Finance  
[shobi@evaint.com](mailto:shobi@evaint.com)

**Nenad Panic**  
Graphic Designer  
[nenad@evaint.com](mailto:nenad@evaint.com)

**Gemma Keen**  
Events Coordinator  
[gemma@evaint.com](mailto:gemma@evaint.com)

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# Contents

Spring 2020



**30**  
**A Passion for Creation**



**22** **Trijets, Trips & Twins Too**



**44**  
**Completing the Circle**

## **04** **Globally Local**

Launched in September 2018, Vista Global Holding is carrying VistaJet into a new era. Chief Commercial Officer Ian Moore explains how, in this exclusive interview

## **22** **Trijets, Trips & Twins Too**

Van Nuys-based Planet Nine Private Air is barely two years old, yet it has gained multiple industry accreditations and added a managed fleet to its five owned Falcon 7X trijets. Director of Business Development, Matt Walter takes *EVA* through a couple of hectic years

## **34** **Managing the costs of aircraft ownership**

In the first of two articles, Gary Crichlow, Arc & Co's Director, Aviation Finance, examines the costs and financial considerations of aircraft ownership

## **10** **Passion & Positive Difference**

More than five decades after its formation by industry legend Clay Lacy, Clay Lacy Aviation is looking forward to an expanded, sustainable future in line with its founder's vision. Senior Vice President, Business Operations Scott Cutshall spoke to the editor

## **30** **A Passion for Creation**

Canada's MSB Design is an unusual company specialising in designing, building and prototyping innovative cabin components, as Sales Director Jean-François Thibault explains

## **40** **The Personal Touch at FXE**

Co-founder Lynda Zur and new CEO Marshall Myles are expanding and transforming the Sano Jet Center at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport into the Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center

## **16** **Spirit of St Louis Airport**

Three FBOs and a variety of MROs and supporting companies makes Spirit of St Louis Airport a prime US business and VIP aviation destination

## **44** **Completing the Circle**

ForeFlight has joined Jeppesen in the Boeing Global Services portfolio two decades after the OEM acquired the legendary brand. Now, ForeFlight's expertise is adding value to Jeppesen's decades in the navigation business, as Reggie Arsenault, Director, Digital Solutions, Boeing Global Services, reveals



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# Globally Local

Vista Global is preparing to carry the VistaJet brand into a new era, as Ian Moore, Chief Commercial Officer, explains

On 11 September 2018, VistaJet founder and chairman Thomas Flohr launched Vista Global Holding, before acquiring XOJET and its 43-strong, on-demand fleet of super-mid size jets just a few days later, expanding its owned group fleet to 115 aircraft globally. The following April, Vista Global announced plans to absorb JetSmarter, effectively employing its online technologies to offer digital booking processes across the XOJET and VistaJet fleets; last June, VistaGlobal brought the operational expertise of XOJET and JetSmarter's technology together, launching a new brand known as XO and described as a 'global On Demand Private Aviation Marketplace'.

All of which demonstrates the increasing importance of industry consolidation and innovation, but begs the question of what, exactly, is Vista Global? It's not an aircraft operator and neither is a digital platform.

Chief Commercial Officer, Ian Moore sits on the executive committees of both VistaJet and Vista Global. He explains: "Vista Global is really a holding company for a vision. We've learned a lot over the 15 years of VistaJet and realise there are so many different parts to the industry that need further 'industrialisation', like we already did with VistaJet.

"VistaJet looked at the imperfections of the ownership model and created a business out of what hadn't previously been available. Now, we've recognised several other elements in the industry that require the same treatment and disruption.

"Vista Global is a combination of VistaJet, XO – our digital marketplace that's creating a platform where aircraft owners and users can meet in an efficient manner globally – and our VistaLease business, which recognises that there are people who just want their own aircraft. We want to create an ecosystem where we as a company can go and meet anyone who uses private aviation, whether seat sharing or aircraft owning, and offer a solution."

Moore came to VistaJet in 2010 and recalls a degree of frustration in 'not being able to speak to everyone'. "Not everyone wanted 50 hours or more on a fleet of dedicated, super-mid size and above aircraft spread around the world. It was a very niche sales approach and VistaGlobal enables us to go in and ask what the client wants. No other company can really go in and listen to clients like that, without simply pitching what it is that they have to sell."

While acknowledging that VistaGlobal requires further consolidation, Moore says it aims to be at the forefront of emerging markets, including the digital marketplace. "We want to be first to create it, because we feel it will be a winner-takes-all scenario. That's why we're creating XO. We've built VistaGlobal by listening to our clients, prospects and staff." Put simply, it's an enabler that allows VistaGlobal customers to achieve whatever it is they need to achieve, whether it fits the VistaJet model or not.

## VistaJet People

Moore recognises the contribution VistaJet's staff have made to Vista Global and agrees they are the heart of the VistaJet offering. To step inside a VistaJet Global 6000 cabin is to step inside any VistaJet Global 6000. They are equipped and completed to the same high standards, so much so that individual aircraft are essentially identical. And they're the same on the outside too, since the entire fleet wears VistaJet's splendid silver and

red scheme. Private flying tends to be a very personal experience and the key to providing that through a fleet of similarly equipped, liveried aircraft is the crew.

“Our cabins have been designed in a neutral but very classical European way – VistaJet was born in Europe and that’s a natural starting point. We choose timeless elements, avoiding trends for things that are cool one day and not cool the next. The thought process is to have space and comfort, enhanced by the lighting and dark colours that become lighter higher up in the cabin.”

But the ‘secret sauce’, he says, is understanding the VistaJet clientele and how crews employ that understanding. “You could be working with an Asian customer and think they want an Asian service, then find you’ve really annoyed them because they wanted a very European-style of service. Equally, you could bring in standard catering for a North American client and discover they were after sushi and sashimi.

“So, we understand our clients and aim to create a home from home in the air, an extension of their lifestyle. For that we prepare a very detailed profile. It ensures that every time a client comes aboard the aircraft, they exhale as if they’re on their couch at home. And it’s not just about the private dining on board, it’s also the temperature of the cabin, the music that might be playing, where they want their jacket hanging and where they leave their phone for charging. It makes them feel at home and like this is their aircraft.”

And, although for the duration of any flight the aircraft crew is effectively the entirety of VistaJet as far as the customer is concerned, the process of gathering data and acting upon it to perfect the client experience reaches far beyond the cabin. “We gain information from every one of our touchpoints, whether our sales or customer service teams, or crew. Everyone is tasked with ensuring that we’re continually updating and downloading more information about a client so their next flight is better than their last.”

Thanks to VistaJet’s worldwide office network, it also prides itself in having customer service advisors with local knowledge of wherever a client is. It also



usually has someone in the same time zone as the client. “We’re a global company, but our aim is for our customers to feel we’re local,” Moore summarises.

He also notes that VistaJet invests considerable time and money in crew training. “The COO personally interviews every single pilot we hire. It’s about their ethos and their technical capability, they are a special breed. Our pilots have simulator training twice per year and come to the ‘mothership’ in Malta not only to understand what we’re doing in the cockpit, but also in the cabin, and what we’re aiming to do for our clientele around the world and what the company’s plans are. We have a maniacal

focus on getting the right people, then on ensuring they’re trained twice as much as the industry requires, and understand the company’s objectives.

“We also invest a lot of time and effort ensuring we select the right people for our cabin hostesses. Our head of cabin service flies around the world interviewing every member of cabin crew we bring onboard. They are the most consistent touchpoint with our customers and they have to be of the right mindset, as well as going through multiple levels of internal and external training.

“They train with the British Butler Institute, they’re trained to WSET [Wine And Spirit

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## Ian Moore

Chief Commercial Officer

“I came across a tiny company in London, in 2002, called NetJets. I hadn’t heard of them. I wasn’t an aviation person, I have an economics background, I like how business works, trying to solve business problems and meeting people with interesting takes on the world.

“I worked with NetJets for six years, then spent some time with a start-up in India, before joining VistaJet in 2010. It’s been one hell of a journey! I didn’t think I’d be at this one company as long as I have, but VistaJet, and now VistaGlobal, keep making sure there are more and more things for me to do.”

Education Trust] Level 2 and we’re working with the Norland College to have all our cabin hostesses trained on how to deal with our little people just as well as our lead passengers. Other companies just can’t do these things on a global scale. We’re investing not only in the ‘hard metal’ of our aircraft, but also in the people who provide our service. We’ve spent a lot of money on aircraft, but our people are our most important asset. Our customers want to feel like they’re being dealt with exclusively and solely, and that’s the secret for our cabin crew.”

### VistaJet Aircraft

VistaJet has been consistently loyal to Bombardier in its aircraft investment and Moore reckons the Canadian OEM provides the most optimal cabin experience for its clients, but recognises that extremely capable alternatives are also available. “We’re also very proud to be the first operator to have a Global 7500 fleet; the aircraft appears to surpass even the new Gulfstream G700. We invested in the aircraft back in 2012, so it was a long, long punt. But we aren’t married to Bombardier. If another manufacturer comes up with an aircraft in the categories we want to be in that is better for our clientele, then we’ll go with them.”

The Global 7500’s large cabin is enabling even greater refinement in VistaJet service, and not only because of its additional living space. “The galley, for example, gives us an oven, which changes the food and dining experience. But we’ve found that our customers are really using the aircraft’s extra range – over long-range flights it’ll probably deliver a time saving

of 20%, so although it might have running costs 30% higher, 20% of that is returned not only in time, but in costs per hour. We believe it’s a game changer.

“We think some of our clients will step up from the Global 5000 or 6000 to the 7500, as we’re seeing the purchase of an aircraft like the Global 7500 becoming less palatable to corporate shareholders. Our early indicators of interest tell us we’re entering into a new paradigm for corporates where going out and buying a \$70-million aircraft for flying 200 or 300 hours per year doesn’t make sense anymore. We’re expecting an entirely new type of client because of it. Going non-stop from New York to Asia, the extra 13 feet of cabin length – it’s a game changer.”

While the Global 7500 is perhaps changing the way people fly, many of those same people are increasingly concerned about the environmental impact of their flying. Since VistaJet is a European company, more than 40% of its aircraft carbon emissions are offset through the European carbon trading scheme. “But that’s not enough,” Moore says; he’d actually come into the interview late, delayed by work on a new sustainability paper.

Reluctant to reveal details on what was then a work in progress, Moore nonetheless confirmed: “There’ll be an offsetting element to it and continuing efforts to ensure that 95% of our cabin amenities are sustainable. And we already offer an early booking discount, because that enables us to find the most efficient way to fly customers, bringing down our carbon footprint

### IAN MOORE

...we understand our clients and aim to create a home from home in the air, an extension of their lifestyle

and costs. I think our business plan also serves as an antidote to the wastage we see in our industry, where people might buy 200 hours on an aircraft but another 100 hours are wasted ferrying it to where it's needed or even to park it because there's no space at the destination.

“On top of all that, through XO we offer seat sharing, looking at reducing the inefficiencies of flying empty seats. We're offering customers the opportunity to have all the seats filled, offsetting some of the cost of their flight and creating efficiency. So, we're minimising empty legs and eliminating cabin inefficiencies. But it's still not enough, so we're partnering with experts to help us become properly sustainable and help us educate our clients and the industry. We take our role in this very seriously.”



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# Passion & Positive Difference

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*Clay Lacy Aviation has remained true to its legendary founder's principles for more than 50 years. Senior Vice President, Business Operations Scott Cutshall says a combination of passion, professionalism and commitment is building on that legacy for generations to come*

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After a couple of days of sensory overload and pacing the NBAA-BACE halls, I was rushing, tail between legs, apology prepared, to the Clay Lacy Aviation booth, having earlier found myself 20 minutes' walk away when I realised I was already 10 minutes late for a long-arranged half-hour meeting with Senior Vice President, Business Operations Scott Cutshall.

My thoughts were already turning to dinner and tomorrow's flight home, and there was an end-of-show vibe at Clay Lacy Aviation too. Finding Scott in the crowd, I offered my humble apologies, made tentative arrangements for this very article, then expected to be on my way. But he and the team were genuinely interested to talk. A Coke appeared and there was no question of a quick getaway. As Scott introduced a variety of industry people, his enthusiasm became

obvious. And then, as casually as if he were offering another drink, he said: "Clay's here. Would you like to meet him?"

I've been an aviation enthusiast, avgeek, plane nerd, spotter – take your pick, they're all accurate – pretty much forever. 'Clay Lacy' for me meant air racer and test pilot, a man so legendary he might have been made up for a fairy tale. Meet him? Heavens, yes!

Today, in order to properly understand the aviator and his legacy, it's important to separately consider the intertwined histories of Clay Lacy the man and Clay Lacy Aviation, the organisation he created. Having said which, the enthusiasm for aircraft that drives Mr Lacy and continues to inspire Scott Cutshall, also appears to pervade the entire company.





Lacy with fellow Living Legends of Aviation John Travolta and Tom Cruise, and Top Gun actor Tom Skerrit

“Our people and their passion for making a positive difference in the aviation industry is what distinguishes Clay Lacy Aviation,” Scott says. “When an individual has a passion for something, we believe that comes through in their interactions with clients, suppliers and colleagues.

“There is a natural curiosity, and a desire to contribute in positive, substantial ways, which means we make decisions that add value for our clients, increase safety, by reducing unnecessary risks, and keep a relentless focus on improving service and the client experience. Decisions aren’t made to benefit distant shareholders or an international conglomerate, they are made by people who love what they do, who are actively involved in the business and frequently interact with our clients.”

But isn’t there a danger of this love of aviation clouding judgement, with folk losing sight of the serious business of aviation as a business? How does Clay Lacy Aviation succeed, but with passion? “We focus on the data, and data analytics,” Scott explains. “We don’t make decisions based on feelings or intuition. When someone in the company makes a statement, it is commonly followed up with ‘show me the data to support that’. This approach keeps our passion for aviation aligned with corporate objectives and client needs.”

So, Clay Lacy Aviation is fuelled by a powerful mix of focused avgeeks. Who’s the biggest

in the company? Scott protests for less than three seconds... “I don’t believe I can possibly answer that. In fact, I think it would probably come down to a two or three-way tie between our CEO Brian Kirkdoffer, our VP Fleet Development Joe Barber and our VP East Coast Operations, Chris Hand. Although I could easily add four more names to the list.”

#### Long-time Loyalty

The combination of passion and focus promotes considerable loyalty among Clay Lacy Aviation staff and at the time of writing in January 2020, five of the leadership team had been with the company more than 30 years, while many other employees had celebrated their 25-, 20- and 15-year anniversaries. “Clay and Brian – who celebrates 30 years with the company this year – place an enormous emphasis on loyalty and hard work.

“We also have several clients whom we’ve been serving for 20 to 30 years, or who’ve owned and placed two, three or four jets with us over many years. We are not perfect, but we have a dedicated team that strives for perfection and always does the right thing by the client.”

Headquartered alongside its FBO at Van Nuys, Clay Lacy Aviation has remained loyal to the California airport into which its founder first flew a Learjet in 1964. From there, the company manages a fleet of 110 business jets representing 45 different aircraft models from



## Clay Lacy

### Founder & Chairman

Born in Wichita, Kansas, during 1932, Clay Lacy began flying aged 12. In January 1952 he left Wichita for United Airlines as a DC-3 co-pilot. Two years later, he took military leave and trained as a fighter pilot. In August 1955 he returned to United, but continued part-time military service with the California Air National Guard.

Among the first pilots to receive a Learjet type rating, in November 1964, Lacy managed sales for the Learjet distributor in the seven Western States.

In another career extension, he placed first in the 1970 Reno Unlimited Pylon Race to become the 1970 National Champion. His subsequent air racing career included victory in the jet class of The Great Race from London, UK to Victoria, British Columbia, flying a Learjet 24, in 1971.

Lacy also had a major impact on aerial filming, his exclusive Astrovision-equipped Learjet’s transforming and leading the emerging industry.

Lacy has in excess of 50,000 hours as a pilot, 32 type ratings on fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, and retired as United’s senior captain in 1992, after 40 years and seven months. Six years later, he flew a Boeing 747SP around the world, establishing a new world speed record and raising more than \$500,000 for children’s charities.

Also an experienced test pilot and recipient of multiple awards, Lacy founded Clay Lacy Aviation, at Van Nuys Airport, in 1968.

every major manufacturer and with a total value in excess of US\$2 billion. Among those aircraft, individual examples of some types, including the PC-24, beg the question of how Clay Lacy Aviation is able to apply equal care and expertise to every jet it manages.

“This is where our unique approach creates greater value for our clients,” Scott explains. “First, our maintenance division includes 95 employees and provides complete MRO services to managed and non-managed aircraft. Providing MRO to non-managed aircraft enables us to employ more technicians, invest in training and tooling for a wider variety of business jet models, and maintain cooperative working relationships with OEMs and major MRO providers.

“Second, our personalised flight department approach to managing aircraft affords clients the option to either have a dedicated, full-time director of maintenance, or a shared director of maintenance. If they elect for the shared model, the person assigned to oversee the maintenance on their plane is probably managing other similar makes and

models. Therefore, in short, our diverse set of management, charter, maintenance, avionics, interiors and FBO services allows us to invest in equipping, staffing and training our team on a wide variety of business jet platforms.”

As a result, the company’s MRO offering is surprisingly broad. Scott explains: “IFEC upgrades and cabin refurbishment capabilities exist primarily at Van Nuys. Our experienced team is capable of a wide variety of installations and upgrades, but the most popular are Wi-Fi connectivity with the Gogo AVANCE L3 and L5, and Honeywell JetWave installations. Other routine upgrades include lighting conversions to LED and cabin management system updates to more modern components and systems. We complete interior reconfigurations and refurbishments through several on-site vendors whom we’ve worked with for more than 20 years.”

Clay Lacy Aviation has remained loyal to Van Nuys throughout its 50-year history, but Scott notes: “We have three FAA Part 145 repair stations in Van Nuys, San Diego and Waterbury-Oxford. We also have mobile

SCOTT CUTSHALL

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CEO  
Tel. +32 471 942 780  
[danny.vranckx@aviaco-gse.com](mailto:danny.vranckx@aviaco-gse.com)

**Bart Kroonenberg**  
COO  
Tel. +31 653 765 332  
[bart.kroonenberg@aviaco-gse.com](mailto:bart.kroonenberg@aviaco-gse.com)



**Right:** Brian Kirkdoffer, CEO Clay Lacy Aviation  
**Below Right:** The editor and Clay Lacy at NBAA-BACE 2019

response teams at these location in addition to Orange County/John Wayne Airport and Boeing Field/King County, Seattle. Our tooling, training, and capabilities vary by location, but coordination and standardisation runs through headquarters.” To date, the Van Nuys facility has remained Clay Lacy Aviation’s only full-service FBO but, Scott confirms, “We are pursuing several strategic FBO locations and hope to add two to three more sites in the coming years.”

### Enduring Legacy

Providing opportunities through sponsorship and scholarship for young would-be pilots and mechanics has always been of particular importance to Clay Lacy, and it’s a policy Clay Lacy Aviation embraces enthusiastically. In Scott’s opinion: “Clay set a very good example, one that our current CEO and leadership team firmly believe in following. We are passionate about aviation and would not be where we are if people had not helped each of us along the way in our careers; it just makes sense to help those that will follow after us.

“Aviation is expensive and the biggest hurdle to becoming a pilot, mechanic or cabin attendant is often the cost of training. We’ve decided to focus our giving on helping develop the next generation of aviation professionals, not only through scholarships, but job shadow days, internships and participation in industry organisations and committees.

“Joe Barber, our VP of Fleet Development, is a prime example of this commitment. He was named to NBAA’s first class of ‘40 under 40’ and is co-chair of the NBAA Leadership Conference in 2020 and 2021. The themes of those conferences are based on recruiting and retaining talent to grow the business aviation workforce.”

Few in the industry would deny that sustainability is equally important as nurturing the new generation of professionals that will be responsible for step changes in how business aviation operates. Indeed, Scott confirms: “We believe a focus on



sustainability will be one of the largest areas of focus for the worldwide business aviation industry over the next decade. We are active in this space and preparing to make some announcements very soon.”

### Dynamic Mix

The enthusiasm pervading Clay Lacy Aviation’s booth appears endemic to the company as a whole. “There’s an overwhelming sense that we can achieve anything if we focus our time, talent and determination,” Scott reports. “It’s a great mix of tenured aviation professionals and younger, up-and-coming talent that combines for a wonderful dynamic. Personally, I enjoy working for a private company where people are committed to building something that makes a difference

in the world and our industry, not just pleasing the shareholders.

“Clay was a thought leader and commentator, especially through his many years of writing for Professional Pilot magazine. We are encouraging and fostering individuals within Clay Lacy Aviation that have the passion, knowledge and ability to continue his example.

“We focus on doing the right thing, being thoughtful, proactive, accountable and paying attention to the details, while realising there is always room for improvement. Clay has done quite a job on building his own legacy. Our part is to continue to build a company that bears his name, while upholding the values he exhibited throughout his hall-of-fame career.”



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# Spirit of St Louis Airport

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*The major business aviation gateway into St Louis, a city steeped in aviation history, Spirit of St Louis Airport hosts three FBOs and a wide variety of MRO and supporting services*

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In May 1927, Charles Lindberg flew the Ryan NYP monoplane *Spirit of St Louis* from New York to Paris. The first ever solo transatlantic flight, Lindberg's adventure was a seminal moment in aviation history. A resident of St Louis, he named the NYP after his supporters back home, creating a moniker ideal for another pioneering aviation adventure that began three decades later.

The city of St Louis's connection with aircraft design and production dates to 1939, when James McDonnell established McDonnell Aircraft, a company that became McDonnell Douglas in 1967 and was later subsumed by Boeing; today St Louis is a centre of F-15 and F/A-18 production and support.

A keen private pilot, Paul D Haglin joined McDonnell as an aeronautical engineer in the late 1950s. He quickly became disillusioned with St Louis Lambert Field, where burgeoning commercial traffic was pushing out the general aviation operators. Looking for a new airfield at which to base his Cessna 195, Haglin began a two-decade odyssey during which Spirit of St Louis Airport (KSUS or SUS) emerged as a brand new airport at Chesterfield, close to St Louis. In 1971, the FAA rated it among the country's four most important privately owned airports and in 1980 it passed from private to county control.

### Aero Charter

Today, SUS boasts three FBOs, flight schools, at least seven MRO providers, charter operators and aircraft sales outfits. Among the FBOs, John Morgenthaler Sr and Robert 'Bob' Thomas founded Aero Charter in 1966, as Aero Enterprises. By 1974 they had an office at St Louis Lambert Airport and a five-aircraft fleet.

Four years later, they incorporated Aero Charter for aircraft management and commercial air carrier services. In 1983, Aero Charter added jet capability to its aircraft management offering.

Construction of the initial 72,000sqft SUS facility began in 1992, alongside a 24,000sqft hangar in the airport's southwest corner. An avionics shop opened in 2001, and in 2009, ramp space was expanded by 38,000sqft. By 2011, an additional hangar, more office

space and further expanded ramp space were helping accommodate Aero Charter's growing operations. Early in 2020, the company was operating a mixed fleet of 13 jets and turboprops, alongside its recently renovated FBO.

Equally capable of handling piston singles as it is the Global 7500, Aero Charter offers full FBO services, maintenance (Aero Charter SUS is a TBM authorised service centre), avionics, flight crews and acquisitions. Significantly, it was also recently classified as Stage 1 IS-BAO compliant.

Passengers and crew visiting the FBO benefit from a variety of beverages and complimentary snacks, a planning lounge, a sleep lounge with new La-Z-Boy recliners and HD Satellite TV, two Ford Focus crew cars and more. Ground transportation, catering, hotel accommodation and any other requirements can also be satisfied.

### Million Air & TAC Air

The Million Air FBO was established at SUS in 1984. Capable of handling aircraft from single-engine pistons up to the Gulfstream G650, Million Air adds hangarage to an

offering that includes fuelling and other ground services.

Its multiple award-winning FBO includes concierge services, crew cars, a pilot lounge, rental cars, hotel reservations and more, Million Air priding itself on treating its customers like family, with a focus on service.

TAC Air's FBO has been operating at Spirit of St Louis Airport for 30 years. The largest of the airport's FBOs, it boasts more than 2.5 million square feet of hangar space, 110,000sqft of office and shop/maintenance area and 1.5 million square feet of ramp area over 27 acres, providing plenty of space for visitors and its 65 based aircraft.

A Phillips 66 Aviation partner, TAC Air offers a full range of ramp services, including free Wi-Fi, for business and military aircraft, in addition to on-site maintenance. Philip Bissonnette has been general manager since 2009 and explains: "We have the equipment to handle all narrowbody aircraft and, on a limited basis, we can service larger aircraft. The largest to date was a C-17 Globemaster III." TAC Air is also the only SUS FBO with deicing services.

**PHILIP BISSONNETTE**  
General Manager TAC Air

**"We have the equipment to handle all narrowbody aircraft and, on a limited basis, we can service larger aircraft. The largest to date was a C-17 Globemaster III."**

“The TAC Air mantra, ‘Service With No Ceiling’, exemplifies our customer commitment. With 24-hour customs access, car rentals, valet parking, catering, hotel and transportation coordination, overnight parking, spacious seating areas, a conference room, complimentary snacks and beverages and more, we provide every customer the highest level of service,” Bissonnette says.

Meanwhile, the FBO has a fully-equipped crew lounge and ‘ultra-comfortable’ sleep area. Updates to the pilots’ lounge, conference room and lobby facilities will be completed by mid-2020.

TAC Air SUS is one of a national network of 15 FBOs and as the first large-chain FBO network to achieve IS-BAH Stage 2, customers are assured that TAC Air meets rigorous aviation industry safety standards and that its safety management and associated activities are appropriately targeted, and safety risks effectively managed.

Those high standards have helped attract a number of corporate customers: “We are proud to be trusted by some of the largest corporate flight departments, charter companies and fractional providers,” Bissonnette comments. “We have the largest and most experienced service staff and customers appreciate the value of seeing the same faces consistently.”

The size and scope of TAC Air SUS also enables it to host and support major events. Among these, the PGA Championship and other sporting fixtures bring an influx of customers, while the FBO also provides ground services, coordination and management for one of the largest US air shows, The Spirit of St Louis Air Show and STEM Expo.

#### **Duncan Aviation**

Spirit of St Louis Airport proudly hosts a number of maintenance providers, including Aero Charter, AVMATs, Dassault, Duncan Aviation, Elite Aviation, Flying Colours and Mistwood Aviation.

Duncan Aviation’s facility is a satellite avionics location providing



The pilots’ lounge at TAC Air

troubleshooting and repair, as well as installation. Ed Reeve, Manager of the Duncan Aviation St Louis Avionics Satellite Shop, explains: “In common with the company’s other satellite facilities, we’re supported by Duncan Aviation’s vast network of knowledge, relationships and experience, from engineering and certifications to aircraft sales/acquisitions.”

Reeve says ADS-B activity has been among the shop’s most important work recently, alongside a busy period of AOG service work. “Over the last month, though, we’ve had more radar and autopilot issues crop up. Most of this troubleshooting is diagnosed same-day and repaired the following day after parts are delivered. We normally work on aircraft within a three-hour radius and spend a lot of time driving to the location where an operator needs us due to an AOG issue, although we have travelled as far as Chicago. In fact, we once sent a team member to Spain, with a group of install team members from other satellites, for a six-aircraft FMS upgrade.

**ED REEVE** Manager,  
Duncan Aviation SUS

“I’ve been working in avionics here since 1998 and established great relationships and friendships on the field.”

Satellite Installations Crew Leader Ryan Wagner troubleshoots a ProLine 4 Flight Management computer on a BeechJet 400A at Duncan Aviation's SUS facility



Much of our work is done on the field, though, supporting customers based here in St Louis.”

Between them, the four-man SUS team has more than 60 years of combined avionics experience and is actively looking for an additional, experienced colleague. Among the more recent Duncan Aviation avionics satellite locations, the St Louis facility was established in February 2011 out of the former Signature TECHNICAir shop. Duncan Aviation had actually been at SUS at the beginning of the 1990s, but a devastating flood in 1993 virtually destroyed the airfield and closed the shop.

A long-serving member of the SUS community, Reeve says: “I’ve been working in avionics here since 1998 and established great relationships and friendships on the field. I really view the airport as my Chesterfield family and that means I know the operators with aircraft based here and supporting them is a top priority. Others on the field feel the same way. Everyone has either worked with one another or for one another, and we do what we can to support our clients and aviation in the area.

“Even if we are competitors, we work together to support our mutual clients. If I get a call for airframe maintenance service on an airplane that I can’t support, I’ll refer it to a

competitor. They do the same with avionics issues. Our main goal is to keep our base customers flying.”

#### Flying Colours

Reeve’s is a sentiment echoed by Scott Meyer, recently appointed vice-president and general manager of Flying Colours’s SUS facility. “Resource sharing and collaboration is always a leverage point that everyone at every airfield tries to exploit to the fullest extent to attract aviation business to the airfield and surrounding community. We see it as our obligation to do all that we can to support the community we live in and serve.”

He explains that at Spirit of St Louis Airport, “We offer a full range of MRO services under one roof. They include minor airframe modifications and structural repair, routine and unexpected maintenance inspections, landing gear overhaul and repair, corrosion and composite repairs, avionics upgrades, and a full complement of interior cabin refurbishment.” The Ontario-headquartered company is renowned for its Bombardier expertise, but Meyer notes that its capability extends to Beechcraft, Cessna, Dassault, Embraer, Gulfstream, Hawker and Pilatus aircraft too.

Flying Colours became established at SUS after acquiring the JetCorp Tech facility in 2009. “Flying Colours had been working in partnership with them on a number of programmes when the owners asked if we’d be interested in acquiring the facility, which we did,” Meyer says. “In 2013, JetCorp became Flying Colours KSUS, aligning the brand and processes across the North Americas.

“We have four hangars with nine aircraft slots, two of which are capable of accommodating large, ultra-long range aircraft. This means we can quickly react to drop-in requests and AOG circumstances. We are very ‘present’ on the airport with an extensive footprint across hangars and workshops, so we can respond quickly to customer needs.”

Spirit of St Louis Airport brands itself as the ‘Business Aviation Center of the US’ and, given its central location in the country and extensive FBO, MRO and extended service offering, it seems a claim well made.

#### SCOTT MEYER VP and GM, Flying Colours SUS

“We have four hangars with nine aircraft slots, two of which are capable of accommodating large, ultra-long range aircraft.”

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**Matt Walter & James Seagrim**  
Director of Business Development & Director of Operations

# Trijets, Trips & Twins Too

*Specialist ultra-long range charter provider and Falcon 7X operator Planet Nine has grown from nothing to a ten-jet mixed fleet in less than two years. Director of Business Development, Matt Walter told EVA how*

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Take two hugely experienced executives, a small group of industry experts and a bold charter business plan, then add the world's largest fleet of ultra-long range Falcon 7X trijets, and the result is Planet Nine Private Air, an unusual Van Nuys-based operator that boasts Wyvern Wingman, Argus and IS-BAO accreditation, yet is only now in its second year of operation.

Planet Nine (P9), received its Part 135 operating certificate on 22 June 2018 and by Monday, 25th, its first Falcon 7X was ready for charter. The plan had always been to build an owned fleet and a second 7X soon followed. Barely had Wyvern Wingman status been achieved in October 2018 than the third Falcon arrived; the fourth entered service in March 2019.

A fifth Falcon 7X arriving early in June 2019 completed the five-aircraft owned fleet just in time for P9's first anniversary, by which time the company was able to announce the availability of its first managed aircraft, a Gulfstream G650, for charter. By the end of 2019, a G550, GV and another Falcon 7X had also joined the roster, while Argus Platinum and IS-BAO Stage 1 approvals had all been granted.

Founded by Director of Operations James Seagrim and Director of Business Development Matt Walter, Planet Nine has enjoyed a meteoric first few months in business, basing its success on a well-conceived business plan and intimate understanding of its customer requirements.





Speaking to *EVA* in January, Matt Walter explained: “Our operation centres on a floating fleet model, which isn’t unique to us but enables us to serve our clients on multiple continents and provide consistent availability at a competitive price point.

“We set up with a base in Los Angeles, one in Europe and another at Teterboro, with technicians, sales agents and dispatchers strategically located at each of those locations as a means of offering point-to-point pricing between the world’s busiest charter markets. They provide a ‘line of sight’ between the West Coast and East Coast of the United States, Europe and the Middle East. We fly to Asia regularly, but more on a traditional round-trip basis.”

The plan had always been to build an owned fleet of Falcon 7X jets and focus on the ultra-long range market. “There are now ten ultra-long range airplanes in the fleet, our five Falcons, a Gulfstream V, 550 and 650, a Global 5000 and another Falcon 7X. We charter manage them all.”

Acknowledging that the business is still young, Walter nonetheless says the owned Falcons are kept quite busy. “We’ve seen growth in aircraft utilisation month over month and the airplanes fly an average of between 85 and 105 hours per month per airframe. We crew with an average five-and-a-half pilots per airplane, which supports the high utilisation and means we can crew in a fashion that allows us to give the pilots a hard schedule. We’ve found that to be key in retaining personnel in a climate where pilots are in demand.”

There’s no questioning the aesthetics and performance of the 7X, but P9’s reasons for owning the type – to the extent where its five represents the world’s largest commercial fleet – run considerably deeper. “The aircraft is highly efficient when compared to its ultra-long range competitors; it burns 30 to 33% less fuel on similar legs. Efficiency was a key component. Also, we wanted to do something different in the highly competitive US and European charter markets; we were

the first to bring the Falcon 7X to market in the United States.

#### Falcon Fans

“The airplane is highly versatile, with the performance to fly out of high elevation, short-field airports. We’ve flown from Aspen to Moscow, for example, which is kind of unheard of for any private jet besides the Falcon 7X. It offers a lot of performance and efficiencies, which makes it a compelling story compared to its competitors in terms of the economics.”

The decision to build P9 around the Dassault Falcon 7X was further informed through examination of several corporate flight departments that were operating the type relatively intensively, while the OEM itself also became involved in the decision-making process.

“They showed us the airplane could do 100 hours per month and they were absolutely correct. We’ve done that ever since inception. We’ve been very happy with the airplane and Dassault. Many of our customers are environmentally conscious and see the aircraft as a tool that can fly ten hours plus, while providing them with the most efficient option for their missions.”

Unsurprisingly, Walter sweeps historic rumblings over inadequate Dassault customer support, especially parts supply, away. “I’ve heard these stories over the years, but it hasn’t been our experience at all. Since we’ve been operating the Falcon 7X, Dassault has been on top of customer support. We work very closely with them. They know what we’re trying to do with their aircraft and they’ve been very responsive. I think they’ve increased parts availability on the west coast and we’ve been able to operate at high capacity because Dassault has been able to support us. We have our own trained technicians, but we work hand-in-hand with Dassault on a daily basis to keep the airplanes airworthy. They’ve been great to work with.”

MATT WALTER

“...we work hand-in-hand with Dassault on a daily basis to keep the airplanes airworthy. They’ve been great to work with.”

The OEM also plays a crucial role in the event of an AOG away from P9’s three bases. Considering a hypothetical customer stranded by a faulty jet in Moscow, Walter explained: “We have technicians based in London, but first we’d go to Dassault for support – the main priority is getting parts to the airplane. Of course, we can’t depend on them for a Gulfstream or the Global, so we have our own maintenance control, that’s the most important thing.

“Also, since all ten aircraft are, for the most part, in the same floating fleet, we’re able to recover an AOG quite quickly or launch a replacement with a tech team, whichever is the most efficient way to get the client moving again.”

#### Owner Requirements

Each of the managed aircraft has unique owner requirements. The owner of two of the aircraft offers them for premium charter whenever they have availability and both jets are inserted into P9’s floating fleet. “They’re not like-for-like,” Walter says, “but they’re still within our focus on ultra-long range airplanes less than ten years old and with new interiors. Then we have owners whose aircraft are available for 75 or 80 hours of charter per month. If they need to fly and their airplane’s over in Europe while they’re in LA, for example, they’re happy just to grab another jet from the fleet. It works out well for them to get the charter hours and still know they have an airplane available. Then there are owners who want their own aircraft available when they want to use it and that’s another scenario.”

Planet Nine had already gone a long way to establishing itself as a Dassault Falcon 7X operator when its first management client appeared – a Gulfstream owner. What’s the thought process that leads a Gulfstream customer to recognise a Dassault operator as the best company to manage their jet?

“The core group of people running the company have a lot of Gulfstream experience and although we chose to buy the Falcon 7X, our focus is on ultra-long range owners who want charter. Whether

Gulfstream V N176SM is among Planet Nine’s managed fleet



Planet Nine has this G650 available for charter



we place a customer on a G550, Global 5000 or Falcon 7X, it's the same kind of charter. Our Falcons serve as the 'charter engine' for the company to cultivate trips in advance, with no need for owner approval; we can basically do what we want with them.

"But as the business grows, we need more inventory and that additional charter just naturally rolls onto these other owner's airplanes. It's allowed us to provide them with more charter than they're used to getting from traditional management companies, because with our Falcons charter is first and foremost. These charter owners benefit from that 'charter engine'. Management companies generally have to go out and sell charter when the hours are available, but we already have trips 'in the can' that we can pass on as demand increases."

Walter credit's P9's ability to take on managed aircraft so soon in its existence to the way the company was built from the outset. "Even when we had just one airplane, we had the infrastructure to support 20," he says, a fact also important in P9's rapid receipt of the Wyvern, Argus and IS-BAO approvals. "It's also a testament to the people we have in our management roles, people who have been in those types of position a decade or more. You need very experienced people to properly operate the type of

equipment we do over as many hours every month as we do."

**Carbon Offset**

And yet P9 offers far more than chartered jets. Typical of its wider product offering, in cooperation with T&M it offers global personal protection to its clients. "The majority of our flights are between the US and Europe, and into the Middle East,

**MATT WALTER**

**"A lot of our customers are from Silicon Valley and Hollywood"**

## Matt Walter

Planet Nine Co-founder and Director of Business Development

A qualified private pilot with a degree in Aeronautical Science from Embry-Riddle, Matt Walter's two decades in aviation include a period between 2010 and 2016 as co-founder, President and Director of Sales of Advanced Air Management, alongside James Seagram.

The company merged with Zetta Jet in 2016, where Walter remained as Director of Sales until 2018, when he and Seagram switched their focus to the Planet Nine start-up.



The bathroom on G550 N41PM



Falcon 7X N996MS is among P9's managed aircraft

Asia and Africa, to secure locations, but personal protection is particularly important to some of our high-profile, high net-worth clients. The security offering expands into cyber, which is becoming more prevalent all the time.”

In fact, security is but one of several options Planet Nine offers its charter customers. “At the time of booking, from catering to carbon offsetting, every kind of additional service is presented. A lot of our business is repeat and so we know the customer’s requirement and might automatically offer security and ensure they fly carbon neutral.”

Through a relationship with TerraPass, P9 has carbon offset available to every client. “Our customers have been very responsive to it. Flying in a Falcon 7X and offsetting the carbon makes their footprint as small as possible while doing things they couldn’t on a commercial airliner and getting into airports where there’s no service. It’s something that set us apart from our inception, the efficiency of the airplane and offsetting. A lot of our customers are from Silicon Valley

and Hollywood, and all of them are more and more conscious of the environmental impact of flying these airplanes.”

Speaking to Walter, it quickly becomes obvious that P9 is more than a business to he and his fellow executive team. “We love to come to work at an airport. The company’s heart is a small core of very experienced aviation professionals driven by love of the airplane. This is a difficult, low-margin, 24-hour, 365-days per year affair and I think passion is critical if you’re to have any longevity.

“We knew we were going to buy five Falcons in our first year and build the brand, but growing the fleet to ten aircraft exceeded our expectations. We’re being very controlled and methodical in what we do, focussing on our specific niche. Our airplanes need to have more than ten hours of range and we’re looking for specific owner types. We’re very conscious of ensuring we have the infrastructure to match the airplanes in our pipeline and since we’re the largest domestic operator of the Falcon 7X, if a customer has a 7X they want to have managed, Planet Nine is really the only choice.”

MATT WALTER

“...if a customer has a 7X they want to have managed, Planet Nine is really the only choice.”

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**Jean François Thibault**  
Sales Director, MSB

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# A Passion for Creation

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*MSB Design specialises in designing, building and prototyping exceptional cabin components, with an unwavering commitment to ingenuity and quality. Sales Director Jean-François Thibault explains*

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Boucherville, Quebec-based MSB Design produces a variety of exquisite interior components for VIP and business jet cabins, blending advanced design techniques and fine materials to create items of exact form and function. Its inserts, for example, prevent crystal, china and flatware ‘chattering’, holding items firmly, with precision, avoiding damage and distracting noise through simple, effective engineering.

The company is also held in high regard for its Hi-Lo pedestal tables, available in a range of styles and individually customisable, yet all based on the same exacting engineering, built to work perfectly and to last. These tables join the inserts and ready to assemble customised cabin kits as the cornerstone of MSB’s output. On top of this, it has its bespoke and prototyping work, including, for example, a retracting tablet-holder, debuted at NBAA-BACE last October.

A simple push on its ‘lid’ has the holder popping out of the sideledge and unfolding in a series of precise motions to present a handy, adjustable and secure mounting point. It’s just as easy to retract, the process of extending and stowing proving such a delight that ‘playing with’ the device is almost entertainment enough.

So carefully are MSB’s products crafted that they become part of the cabin fabric, as much Gulfstream or Bombardier as they

are MSB, to the point where one could be forgiven for never considering where they came from; it’s as though they grew with the aircraft. Add to that the fact that MSB Design was founded only in 2005 and is therefore still relatively young, and it’s easy to overlook the origin of its creations.

To that end, Sales Director Jean-François Thibault, says: “We’ve worked very hard to ensure the leading aircraft manufacturers understand our offering. Our business started in Montreal and we had connections with Bombardier, with which we have worked since our inception. Our sales team has worked hard to forge relationships with other OEMs. Embraer was the second company to make our crystal, china and flatware holders line-fit options.

“A further significant step in our development was opening in Savannah. It demonstrated to Gulfstream, with which we also work closely, that we wanted to deliver to them the quality they needed. That brought many benefits to them and to us as a business. It improved efficiencies and communication, reducing budgets, since there was less distance to cover, no Forex issues (our suppliers are mostly in the US) and minimised issues at border control.

“When Sogclair became our owner in 2014, their international experience added value to our strategy and we were given the resources needed to approach not

just other OEMs but also designers and completion centres. This strategic growth has been essential to our success. We know we still have a long way to go and many territories to cover, but our name and brand is becoming more familiar. We now receive requests from all over the world and that wouldn’t have happened five years ago.”

## Changing Experience

Meanwhile, cabin experience is increasingly about detail design in materials and integration, combined with effective functionality that turns the most mundane, prosaic task – holding an iPad, for example – into a micro-experience. As more passengers turn to personal devices to supplement or even replace viewing on traditional monitors, Thibault sees items like the new MSB tablet holder becoming more important.

“The market is definitely towards much more of a ‘bring your own device mentality’. Most passengers will have two or three devices to hand, so having efficient stowage systems that declutter the cabin and make it easy for passengers and crew to optimise their devices is becoming more significant.

“The cabin is increasingly connected and the tools users connect with are essential to a productive flight. Our mission is to make sure they are easy to use and can be efficiently stowed, as well as ensuring the cabin environment remains streamlined.

Space is at a premium on any aircraft and MSB likes to optimise space in the most useful ways possible.

“Because so many of the products we provide directly interface with the aircraft owner or passenger, they are becoming the user experience. We are seeing a trend towards companies recognising that interior comforts are as important to their customers, or perhaps even more so, than aircraft performance. While each OEM pushes to achieve fuel economy or distance records, many are quietly winning customers by showing them that their cabin experience will be excellent – quiet, comfortable and functional. MSB has become a big part of that message.”

#### Passion for Creation

The passion of its staff, for aviation and engineering, is fundamental to MSB’s success. “We are passionate about creating amazing products of the highest quality and get a real kick out of thinking up new and interesting ways of making the inflight experience even better. Our engineers are given the opportunity to take an idea and create something new, which is so rewarding. Each individual is essential to the success of our business. Without them we would not succeed,” Thibault declares.

Much of the team’s work is typical of the business and VIP aviation juxtaposition of traditional craftsmanship and thinking, applied to modern materials and engineering. In an industry that struggles to recruit young people and a particular niche where considerable skill is required, MSB is careful to attract and recruit the right people and here, as in all it does, the company takes an unusual approach.

“We want to grow and develop our team and aim to encourage their development. So, on the one hand we look for skilled craftspeople, while on the other we look for people with the right attitude – that’s harder to teach and is therefore one of our guiding principles when recruiting team members. We are also lucky enough to work with a pool of talent through the work package and contract division of our MSB Global Resources organisation. Some of those team members choose to join us and already have



Traditional craftsmanship underpins MSB’s unique product line. Julian Haber Photography



Custom-made inserts protect precious crystal, china and flatware. Julian Haber Photography

knowledge of what we do, our approach and what is needed to succeed.”

And how does this expert team apply its talents to the well understood environment of the aircraft cabin? “Through working directly with the OEMs to resolve engineering issues we gain an understanding of the needs of the market, the OEM and the customer, which is shared internally, guiding us as we develop and build our new products. We recognise and understand our customers’ problems and

often provide innovative ideas to help them add value to their aircraft.

“Our drawer-sliders, for example, function better than existing solutions and remove 20lb of weight from the cabin. That’s the kind of product business aircraft manufacturers like to install. We don’t always set out to respond to a customer need, but by working closely with our OEM customers we see opportunities to improve cabin experience in many different areas. Creating space, optimising



Crystal glasses stowed with an MSB insert, preventing chinking and damage

JEAN-FRANÇOIS THIBAULT

“Creating space, optimising functionality and improving and enhancing the passenger experience are core to what we do”

functionality and improving and enhancing the passenger experience are core to what we do.”

It ought to come as no surprise that MSB’s methods for working day-to-day with its customers are also innovative and unusual. Thibault explains: “When we launched the business it developed into two clear divisions. First, there was the contract and work packages element, which put contractors we managed into a variety of aerospace environments. At the same time, we were manufacturing three product lines, optimising our in-house engineering experience: the CCF [inserts], Hi-Lo [table] and cabinetry kits.

“Reflecting the industry, the ‘edges’ between these two operations began to blur as contractors that had worked with

our OEM customers were inspired to suggest new ideas, or the customer would mention they’d met a challenge and we’d make a suggestion to resolve it. This has developed into our R&D division, which we expanded in 2019. Our precision expertise and our ability to rapidly react and resolve challenges has helped build our reputation, which also includes a commitment to quality and customer service.

“As we started working with individual design houses, bespoke items were requested more often; where it makes sense, we adapt and modify these for customers according to their needs. Our ability to create, develop, design, manufacture and install the products makes it seamless for the customer in terms of development and we can continually build on our knowledge and experience. It’s

a unique proposition, but one that benefits the complete value and supply chain. Once we became part of Sogclair, our capabilities also grew as their knowledge of structures enhanced our offering.”

Working very closely with its customers on bespoke design helps MSB overcome the major challenges of such efforts – time and budget. “It is our job to translate the customer request into a product that can be made on time, on budget and delivered to the completion line at the right time. This is particularly true of brand new concepts and we spend significant time making sure we have the basics right before moving on to the final product.

Its abilities for lateral thinking, prototyping and traditional craftsmanship mean that MSB never stands still. “That’s one of the reasons we opened a dedicated research and development building at our Boucherville facility last year. We continue to look at how the market is developing and aim to predict what’s coming next. Recent initiatives have included a new bulkhead door mechanism that is smoother and lighter, and a retractable shower that we anticipate will be popular in the Middle Eastern market.”

In MSB’s most specialist work though, Boucherville says: “Communication with the customer is key, which is one of the reasons we try to be as close geographically to the customer as possible. It might be considered old fashioned, but sitting in a room with a customer and really getting to understand what they need, and what can be provided, is as important now as it was when we started out. The connections, communication and relationship building are essential. With design centres, the challenges may be different and relate more to, perhaps, the possibility of translating an expectation into a reality – sometimes it takes some serious lateral thinking. The rewards are when we deliver the prototype and the customer is delighted. This makes it all worthwhile.”

# Managing the costs of aircraft ownership

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*In the first of two articles, Gary Crichlow, Arc & Co's Director, Aviation Finance, takes a look at the costs and financial considerations of aircraft ownership*

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Established in 2008, Arc & Co describes itself as a boutique debt advisory firm, specialising in the areas of real estate, marine and aviation assets. The company's aviation expertise and research enables it to provide expert advice on all aspects of private jet purchase and leasing, including the thorny problem of what to do should the asset become temporarily or permanently unsustainable.

Gary Crichlow, Arc & Co's Director, Aviation Finance, reckons acquiring an aircraft is the (relatively) easy part, at least as far as understanding the price tag is concerned. Running the aircraft, however, brings a whole host of other costs that can often seem to come from unexpected quarters, especially if the buyer hasn't done their homework beforehand. It's an expensive and complex proposition, and to extract maximum value for money, it's important to take the time to understand how and why running costs accrue.

A good place to start is by talking with a reputable, experienced aircraft operator, ideally before buying the aircraft. Nick Houseman, co-owner and board member of operator Elit'avia advises: "Running costs can really be split into two categories: fixed costs that you pay whether you fly or not, and variable costs that are proportionate to how much you use the aircraft. There is some overlap, especially where maintenance is concerned. Some maintenance is calendar-based, and some

is based on how much – hourly – and how frequently – cyclic – you fly."

Fixed costs include:

- Crew salaries & training
- Insurance & certifications
- Subscriptions
- Hangarage
- Calendar maintenance
- Minimum hours on HCMP

Variable costs include:

- Fuel
- Landing fees
- Navigation fees & overflight charges
- Catering
- Hourly & cyclic maintenance

Once a potential buyer understands where costs will come from, they should benchmark them in an organised way. "We strongly recommend benchmarking against industry standards to ensure you're getting value for money," says Nel Stubbs, Vice President at Conklin & de Decker. "It's a good idea to look at the entire lifecycle of the aircraft and create a budget that captures all of your aircraft-related outgoings."

Translating a benchmarked cost budget to actual savings in operation is where specialist expertise really comes into its own. It can seem like a pricey proposition upfront to invest in the right level of expertise to handle aircraft finance, operation or maintenance, but it can pay

off handsomely in the long-term, helping save time and avoid expensive mistakes.

Almost nowhere is this more evident than when the aircraft undergoes major maintenance, either scheduled or unscheduled. Colin Brickman, Managing Partner at Switzerland-based aviation technical advisory firm CAMO4jets advises savvy clients: "...bear in mind that maintenance companies are in the business of selling man-hours – you need a project manager who knows the going rate for labour, and who can control man-hours, parts and materials sourcing, and defect and repairs management. They also need the contractual nous to negotiate avenues of recourse should things go wrong or go over budget. It's a tall order for anyone who doesn't do this day in, day out as their primary job."

Likewise, paying for maintenance coverage upfront via an hourly maintenance support plan may seem counter-intuitive, but can actually be a sound investment. Lou Seno, Chairman Emeritus and Special Advisor at Jet Support



## Gary Crichlow

Director, Aviation Finance, Arc & Co

As Director, Aviation Finance, Gary Crichlow leads the aviation platform at London-based debt advisory and financial brokerage firm Arc & Co. He has been in aviation finance for the past 13 years, having previously worked as the asset manager at GE Capital and Lombard, and therefore has a deep understanding of the aircraft financier world.

Crichlow has handled numerous aircraft transactions, holds a degree in Aeronautics & Astronautics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is also an American Society of Appraiser-certified aircraft appraiser.



Services Inc (JSSI), comments: “The value of enrolling your aircraft onto a maintenance support plan goes well beyond the predictable budget and protection from unscheduled maintenance repair costs. Aircraft owners also experience enhanced residual values when their asset is enrolled on a programme because the funds accrued are transferable with the aircraft to the new buyer.”

Financiers also look more favourably on an enrolled aircraft because it mitigates their risk. This in turn leads to a simpler due diligence process on the aircraft, a more generous amortisation profile, which means lower financing repayments.

And on the topic of financing, it is an oft-overlooked consideration when it comes to extracting the maximum benefit from an aircraft from a cost perspective. Instead of sinking cash into an aircraft that will almost

certainly lose value over a period of ownership, potential owners could instead put that capital to work in their business or other return-generating investments. The same principle applies if they’ve already purchased an aircraft – it may be worth exploring releasing equity that can then be deployed into investments that further strengthen their cash position. If the aircraft is already financed, it can be worth shopping around for a better deal.

#### **Financial strain?**

Unfortunately, there are times when an owner’s best efforts to benchmark and control costs aren’t enough and they still find themselves facing financial strain. If that happens, there are a few things they can do, and a few things they must do.

Acknowledging financial strain is difficult and attempting to fix it alone appears to be a near-universal human trait.

The worst thing an owner can do is succumb to the natural temptation to ‘go dark’, keeping their operator, hourly cost maintenance programme provider and financier at arm’s length while attempting to sort things out alone. The temptation should be resisted in favour of talking to them early.

They all have an interest in helping an owner succeed and the prevalence of tripartite agreements means that a trip in payments to one party will trigger notifications to everyone else in the chain anyway. It’s far better to be upfront, and rely on their expertise to avoid storing up bigger problems further down the line.

Gary Crichlow says conversations with clients tend to reveal an underlying fear that an admission of financial difficulty would immediately lead to seizure of their aircraft by their creditors. “My years of experience as an aircraft financier indicate this fear is generally unfounded. An aircraft is a complex piece of metal that takes time and effort to turn into liquid cash. Creditors tend to be pragmatic. They know it’s difficult to sell an aircraft at maximum value quickly and that it’s an expensive, involved, risky process. As a result, seizure and repossession is rarely the first thing on a creditor’s mind. On the contrary, they generally take a positive view of

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**“The value of enrolling your aircraft onto a maintenance support plan goes well beyond the predictable budget and protection from unscheduled maintenance repair costs.”**

clients who are upfront and transparent, and are more willing to be pragmatic about restructuring a solution that better matches the client’s cash flow.”

Above all, if an owner can’t afford to fly an aircraft, they should not allow its upkeep to fall away. Neglecting an aircraft can be hugely expensive to rectify; as it progressively falls out of its maintenance regime it will become exponentially more expensive to bring it back to currency when the situation improves. And the stigma of even a short period of neglect can be anathema to most buyers if the situation doesn’t get better.

The key is to talk, and talk early. Operators and financiers, if they’re involved, have an interest in helping owners succeed, and they have the expertise to help them avoid storing up bigger problems further down the line – for example, by agreeing to a financial restructuring to provide breathing space, reducing the aircraft’s flying to minimum hours, using charter revenue to offset some of the running costs or keeping the aircraft in a state of preservation.

The second essential is to be realistic. Aircraft values go one way over time:

downwards. And aircraft sales tend to take time. So an owner facing initial difficulties with limited prospects for improvement stands a better chance of maximising the equity out of their aircraft if they make the hard choice sooner rather than later. That provides the time to make the sale happen in an orderly fashion that avoids signalling distress to the wider market.

“The best way to achieve a good selling price if you’re facing some difficulty is to keep everything as close to normal as possible about the aircraft,” advises Côme Charron, European Sales Director at aircraft broker Guardian Jet. “Nothing brings out the bargain-hunters faster than the hint of distress in an aircraft sale,” JSSI’s Seno agrees.

Keeping things as close to normal as possible is a team effort and owners will also need expert operational and technical advice. A full-blown financial crisis is not the time to be starting conversations, so a team of experts should be assembled as soon as possible. With the operator and financier involved as well, a coordinated strategy that treats creditors as partners is possible, making a solution that enables an owner to manage on restricted cash flow more likely while ensuring the aircraft is maintained, insured and protected, ready to resume normal operations when the situation improves.

# The Personal Touch at FXE

*An ambitious building programme and rebrand is transforming Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport's much loved Sano Jet Center into the Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center*



Chief Financial Officer Zur and her husband built the Sano Jet Center at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport (FXE) in 2003. Over 17 years of continuous operation, the FBO gained a reputation for competitive pricing and exceptional service, laying the sound foundation upon which Zur and new CEO, Marshall Myles, are expanding the facility as the Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center.

Zur managed the Sano Jet Center throughout its history and is now overseeing an impressive construction plan that began in November

2019 when ground was broken on a sixth, 20,000sqft, hangar. Scheduled for completion this year, it will increase the full-service FBO's hangarage to 120,000sqft, including a paint shop, maintenance facility and two hangars dedicated to transient storage. In addition, lobby renovations were undertaken ready for February's NFL Super Bowl in Miami.

Events, sporting and otherwise, are a particular draw for business aviation users visiting the region and, beyond the 2 February Super



Bowl, Zur says: “We are very excited to have Inter Miami CF’s Major League Soccer Stadium opening in March [under David Beckham’s ownership group]. The facility is immediately adjacent to our campus and we look forward to welcoming the Beckham Group.

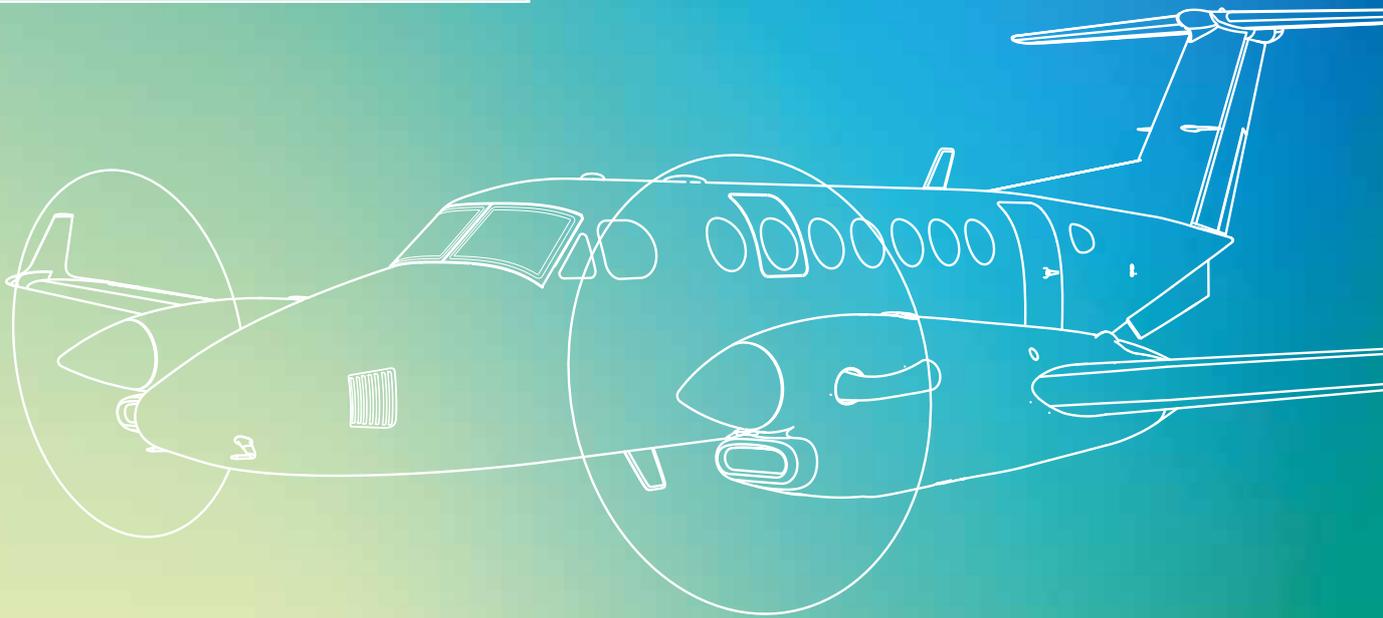
“Meanwhile, Fort Lauderdale is home to one of the largest boat shows in the world and we have many major sports franchises here in South Florida, among them the Miami Dolphins NFL and Miami Heat NBL teams, and Florida Panthers ice hockey.”

In a next phase of expansion, due for completion in 2021, Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center is developing a further 4.5 acres, with a new hangar and more ramp space. Explaining the timing for the company’s investment, Marshall Myles, who spent more than a decade at Skyservice Business Aviation in Canada before joining Zur, says: “We’ve just re-signed a 30-year lease, and we’re making a major investment in expansion. We both see a ton of opportunity to grow the FBO.” Zur continued: “We have the opportunity to expand and grow our footprint by 100%. We are doubling our size at one of North America’s top five general aviation airports.”

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The lobby at Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center

Myles notes that Florida is among the top ten US states for business aircraft registrations. Its air traffic is particularly substantial during the winter months, with roughly half of all registered aircraft in the country based in the state. Combine this with Florida's long-term commitment to the aerospace industry, and it is an obvious hub for business aviation.

It's a fact Zur knows well. "I was here before the FBO was built and I've been actively working on a daily basis to grow the business with a strong, loyal clientele and management team. Marshall has 20 years' experience in the industry, growing and developing Skyservice. Our roles here are quite different, with Marshall working on new business development and growth, while I oversee the day-to-day operations and financial aspects of the business. I have embraced the change in business practices by partnering with Marshall so we can grow and develop the business together."

#### Phillips 66

Given the Sano Jet Center's enviable reputation, regular customers may wonder what to expect from the Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center. Zur is clear: "We are building on our 17 years of high quality customer service and safety standards. We've partnered with a new fuel supplier, Phillips 66, which has a stellar reputation for customer service and support. We are now part of the Phillips 66 Aviation Into-Plane Contract Fuel and WingsPoints Rewards programmes, offering more value to our customers. Our team is excited to participate in the changes and growth, which has generated renewed excitement in the business and enhanced customer service."

New hangars are a major element in that growth and Zur explains: "Weather is always a factor in Florida and space to keep aircraft inside is something more and more people are looking for. Our hangars are all up to the newest Miami-Dade codes [of ordinance], which gives our customers piece of mind. In addition, we are planning to have hangar



space available not only for our based tenants but transient aircraft, which has always been a problem in the south Florida market. We can accommodate anything from a Cessna 152 up to a Global 7500."

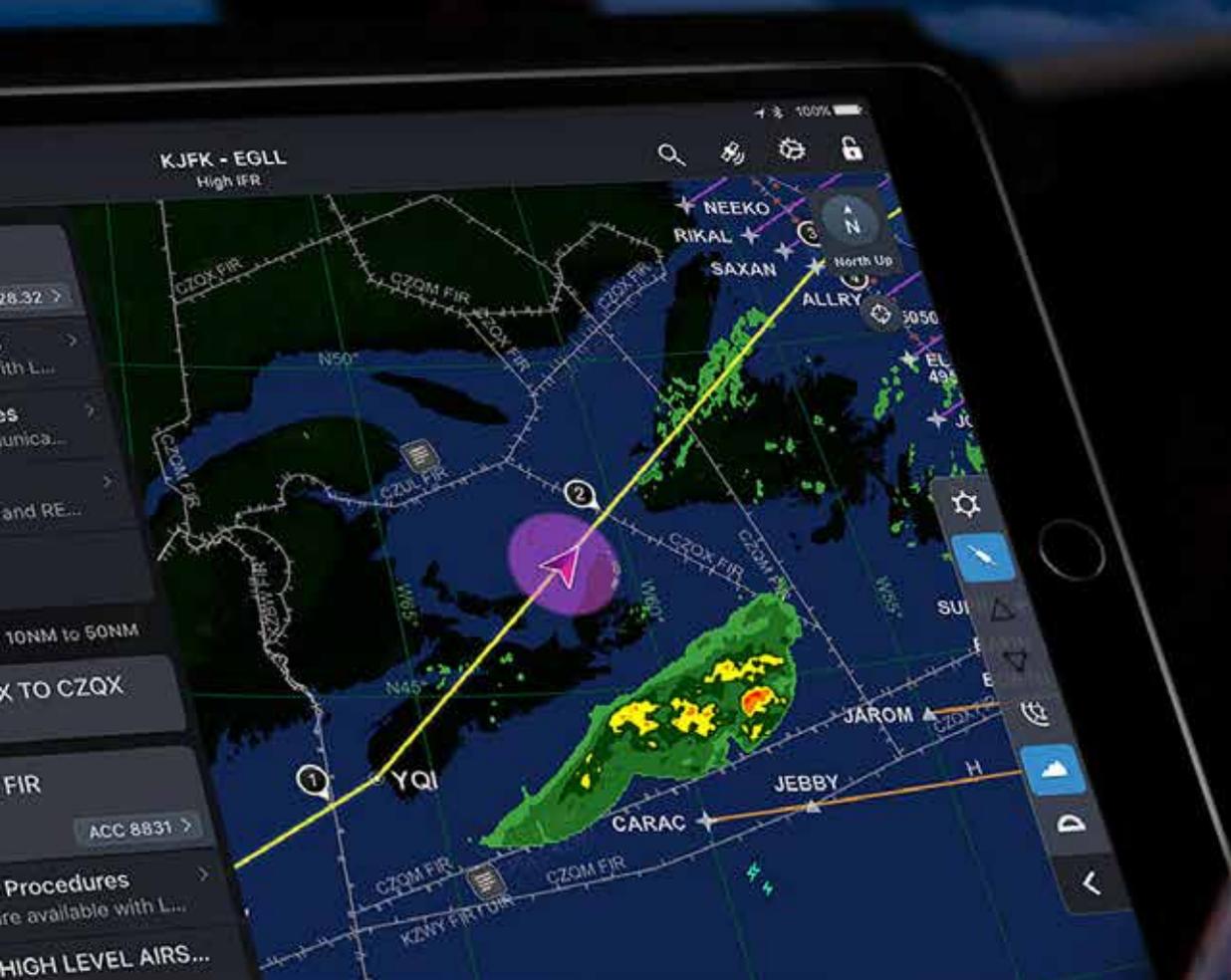
Alongside hangarage and an executive terminal, the Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center is home to a number of tenants and service providers. Among them, Zur says she is excited to have GAMA Aviation as part of the campus. "They provide a number of services at our location, including paint, interior work and complete maintenance capabilities. We also have International Avionics, which has been

part of our team since 2004. Then we have Trinity Air Ambulance, a long-term tenant since 2003. Lastly, we have multiple Part 135 operators, providing local and international charter services."

Fort Lauderdale Executive Jet Center is initially expanding to 10 acres, but will ultimately occupy 20 acres at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport. It's an ambitious expansion plan to which Zur and Myles are enthusiastically committed. Explaining her unwavering dedication, Zur says: "I really do love aviation and we are in a unique situation at FXE - as a boutique operator, our personal touch makes us different."

# Completing the Circle

*Two decades after its acquisition by Boeing, Jeppesen has been joined in the Boeing Global Services fold by ForeFlight. The latter's expertise is adding value to Jeppesen's decades in the navigation business for a new and evolving community of aviation professionals*



Through FliteDeck Pro and other advanced systems, Jeppesen has been at the forefront of electronic flight bag (EFB) evolution



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Business aviation proper arguably emerged during the first half of the 1930s, by which time sustained powered flight was entering its third decade. With the not inconsiderable challenges of becoming and remaining airborne with a useful load overcome, the era's pilots still faced the fundamental issue of finding their way. Navigation by dead reckoning – using map and stopwatch – ultimately served aviation well, but just five years after Lindbergh completed his solo Atlantic crossing, aviators still relied upon recognisable natural features or, better still, roads and railway lines, to navigate cross-country.

Elrey Borge Jeppesen, born of Danish immigrants in Louisiana, began work as an aerial survey pilot in 1928. He was therefore not only well versed in the problems of aerial navigation when he joined Boeing Air Transport, to fly airmail, in 1930, but also uniquely equipped to address them. Later a captain with United Airlines, into which Boeing Air Transport was amalgamated in 1931, Jeppesen began creating his own aeronautical charts.

Using a simple notebook, he recorded salient landscape features and terrain heights, and listed detail that would enable him to fly the same route accurately every time. Fellow pilots were quick to recognise the worth of navigational charts made by a pilot for pilots and in 1934 Jeppesen formed a company to produce and sell his charts commercially.

**ForeFlight**

Completing a circle that's typical of the aviation industry, Boeing purchased Jeppesen in 2000, returning to its fold a concept that began with a company employee almost 70 years previous. Now an important component in the Boeing Global Services portfolio, Jeppesen has continued to deliver on the vision of its founder, moving with and exploiting new technologies so that its state-of-the-art charts are still created by pilots for pilots. Then, in 2019, Boeing acquired ForeFlight, combining its digital expertise with Jeppesen's decades of data gathering to create a new ecosystem of navigation and operational products.



ForeFlight Mobile is combining Jeppesen charts with the ForeFlight app

Reggie Arsenault, Director, Digital Solutions, Boeing Global Services explains: “The acquisition of ForeFlight expanded our portfolio of digital solutions to increase lifecycle value for our customers. Combining ForeFlight’s expertise in mobile, cloud, and e-commerce and software development with the breadth and depth of Boeing’s digital solutions enhances operations for all aviation market segments.

“In the business and general aviation space, our combined expertise in development and global navigation and charting, supported by the unmatched Jeppesen aviation database, allows us to deliver a better customer experience. Feedback from our customers has been very positive, as they recognise the benefit of combining the best practices of industry leaders into a united digital solution set.”

At its most basic, the tie-up enables the full suite of Jeppesen charts to be accessed through ForeFlight’s mobile, electronic flight bag (EFB) apps, adding enhanced flexibility and awareness to a suite of Jeppesen products that today spans navigation, flight and operations planning, and training.

Arsenault says: “Boeing’s portfolio of digital solutions provides operators with choices for optimising their flight operations based on their individual requirements. For example, the Jeppesen JetPlanner solution works best for an operator seeking a way to reduce costs and increase operational efficiency for dispatch staff. It creates fully digital flight plans with optimised routing.

“Alternatively, Jeppesen Operator offers a DIY virtual flight department that takes a one-stop shop approach to consolidating



Flight plan filed from the cockpit, via ForeFlight Mobile

operational support. Customers interested in a more personalised experience can select the FliteSupport Services team to provide 24/7 customised trip planning, dispatch and fuel services, supported by decades of market experience.”

#### Intuitive processes

A cursory glance at the range of Jeppesen and ForeFlight products reveals a system of systems. Arsenault confirms: “Boeing’s digital solutions aim to simplify the complex – we make the integration of solutions sets and digital tools easy to use and understand in the operating environment.

“Our design and development focus incorporates intuitive processes based on real-world use of our products and services, and focus groups that include direct customer input. We provide the right information at the right time, delivered through platforms that pilots and operations staff are comfortable using. This helps eliminate unnecessary processes and provide a sharpened focus on the task at hand.”

Similarly, “Many pilots appreciate the continuity of Jeppesen navigation chart delivery through digital means – with the same look and feel of paper charts, but with much greater functionality on screen, including pinch-and-zoom capabilities, the ability to take notes, and filtering, which allows the pilot to display the

information that is important to them, eliminating ‘clutter’.”

Without clutter, pilots are better able to focus on the task in hand, with improved situational awareness which, in turn, promotes safety and efficiency. Arsenault describes increased operational efficiency as “...a hallmark benefit that Boeing provides its customers. This includes reducing time spent planning for the flight, flying optimised routes and the analysis of data in the post-flight environment.

“Across all phases of flight, Jeppesen solution sets help customers increase situational awareness through enhanced cockpit solutions and data, reduce fuel consumption based on optimised routes and flight planning, and eliminate redundant processes, which allows the pilot and operations staff to focus on essential tasks. We offer solutions that minimise emissions and ensure compliance with regulatory guidelines, including CORSIA [Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation] and similar oversight. Reducing fuel consumption is a key task that benefits the customer through reduced costs and also positively impacts the environment through reduced emissions.”

#### Training

In addition, Jeppesen offers extensive training possibilities and while this obviously includes instruction on its own systems, it also facilitates extensive pilot and technician

course options, and dispatcher certification training. “Across Boeing, we are dedicated to providing a full spectrum of education and support for the next generation of student pilots and aviation professionals,” Arsenault says. “This certainly reflects Jeppesen’s heritage in training and educational support, and lays a foundation for student learning today and in the future, on a global scale.

“Our curriculum, courseware and navigation services are available for onsite training with leading providers of higher education and training, including flight schools and universities. We also offer training courses in-house for numerous groups. More specifically, Boeing Learning Solutions provides a powerful and robust learning system for individuals as well as aviation and maintenance training organisations. Our ab-initio learning content, interlinked with an extensive question database, can be used for self-study, ground school and distance learning – or a combination of all three. Programmes currently include EASA-based content for pilots (PPL, IR, CPL, ATPL) and technicians, and FAA-based content for private and commercial pilot training. The solution is scalable for a wide range of operations, including global organisations, and is well suited to remote areas due to its offline functionality.”

The complete extent of what Arsenault calls Boeing’s ‘full spectrum of education and support’ becomes apparent on navigating through the Jeppesen website. With just a few clicks it might be possible for a corporate flight department to begin the process of acquiring a complete suite of operational tools and apps, for a prospective pilot to purchase the course materials to begin a lifelong aviation adventure, or to acquire a \$4 microphone accessory. It’s an extraordinary offering not only from Boeing, but also Jeppesen, a pioneering company that began almost within the giant planemaker and today has completed the circle, delivering data for pilots, created by pilots, just as it always has.



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**MAIL** info@fai.ag

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Jumeirah Lake Towers

**PHONE** +971-4-452-2422

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