

WINTER 2022/2023

# BUSINESS AVIATION MAGAZINE

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ALHUSSARI

FOUNDER AND CEO  
PRIME TRIP SUPPORT



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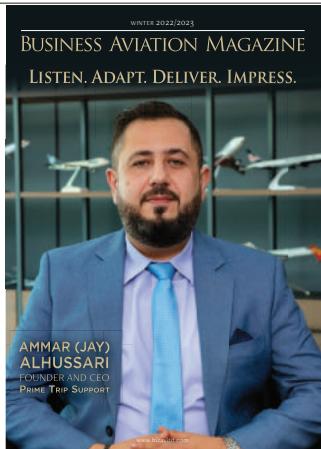
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EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

**NOEL BARTON**  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

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SALES EXECUTIVE

**JANE STANBURY**  
GLOBAL LUXURY CORRESPONDENT

WWW.BIZAVLTD.COM

For all enquiries,  
please contact Max Raja  
at max@bizavltd.com  
or on +44 (0)203 865 3736

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# OPTIMISTIC END, AND A BRIGHT BEGINNING

**O**n behalf of the BizAv Media Ltd team and I, we wish everyone a healthy and prosperous Happy New Year 2023.

It seems pretty clear that despite some speed bumps along the way, business aviation has had a good year.

Sure, inflation is playing havoc with costs and we are all having to get accustomed to double digit inflation after decades in the low single digits. But on the bright side, demand is staying strong for most sectors, particularly in the transactional space. This looks set to continue into 2023, so there is much to be optimistic about, despite the darkness of the conflict in the heart of Europe.

I was particularly struck by the European Commission's 2nd Drone Strategy, which aims at creating what the Commission calls a 'smart and sustainable unmanned aircraft eco-system in Europe'. GAMA put out a press release towards the end of the year, welcoming the document. No surprise there since GAMA and several GAMA member companies were actively involved in formulating the report.

Commenting on it, GAMA says: "The latest strategy rightly highlights the important growing market for both cargo and passenger-carrying Urban and Regional Air Mobility (UAM) operations as a key enabler for the sustainable mobility of citizens and goods in the European Union."

My, how the times they are a-changing. Business aviation is going to be in the forefront of working out how best to use UAVs to cover the distance between a charter passenger's home address and the airfield their charter flight is going to leave from. It is going to be fascinating to see how that develops, though it will doubtless be a few years yet before drone flights become commonplace.

From our side, we were delighted to be able to hold our first BAM Networking party since the pandemic kicked off in April 2020, at this year's NBAA. Our heartfelt thanks to our sponsors, who made it all possible. We look forward to doing more of these in 2023 and to welcoming all our friends and supporters once again. Here's wishing everyone everything of the best for 2023.

ANTHONY HARRINGTON

  
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# WINTER

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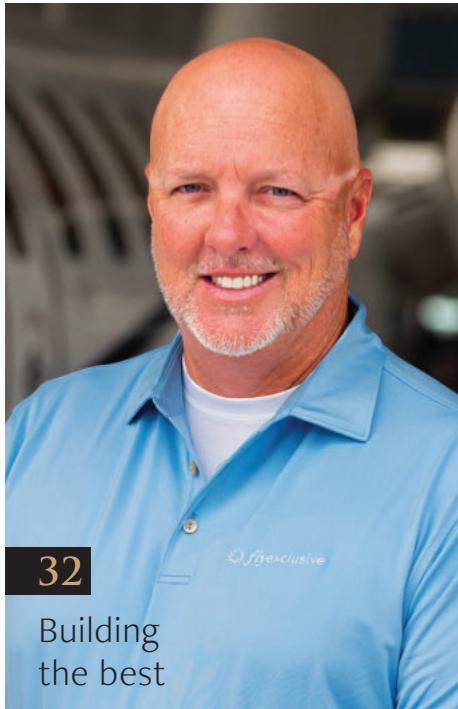


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A collage of images showing the exterior and interior of the Skylink facilities. On the left, there's an exterior view of a modern building with large glass windows and doors, surrounded by trees and a paved area. In the center, there's a view of a lounge or waiting area with black leather couches, a low coffee table with a vase of flowers, and a bar counter in the background. On the right, there's a view of a parking lot with several cars and a fence in the background.





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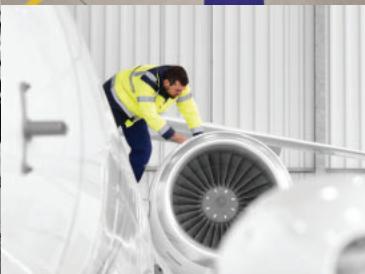
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## LISTEN. ADAPT. DELIVER. IMPRESS.

Ammar (Jay) Alhussari, founder and CEO of Prime Trip Support,  
talks to Anthony Harrington

### AH: Jay, how did you first get involved in business aviation?

JA: I have been around aviation for as long as I can remember. It was everyday talk around the house when I was young since my father was heavily involved in aviation. This was both as a professional and because he was instrumental in establishing the civil aviation infrastructure in the Middle East.

I remember learning what an overflight permit was when I was still in primary school! In high school, I began working with him and helped in the launching of an industry powerhouse. I spent 20 plus years in the organisation before founding Prime.

During this time, I dedicated a lot of my time and energy to various advocacy projects within the industry. I served on several committees, including the NBAA International Operators Committee (IOC), of which I am still an advisory committee member.

I am fortunate to have spoken on dozens of industry panels over the years and have contributed to many articles that promote the growth of aviation. In 2021, I decided to launch Prime Trip Support to transform my knowledge and philosophy of white glove trip support and to reshape customer experience in the industry.

We began operations in 2021. Prime was formed to provide exceptional international trip support and logistics services to the aviation community. Our goal is to provide white-glove services to several different client types, including private operators, commercial operators, and military operators.

Prime's vision is to become the predominant international trip support company in the world, respected for our ability, attitude, reputation, and followership. We want clients to associate the name Prime Trip Support with the utmost



quality and professionalism. We wanted to elevate the bar of customer service and client experience in the trip support industry; that is our mission for Prime Trip Support.

**AH: What is it that makes trip support such a demanding activity, best contracted out to a professional trip support company?**

**JA:** International trip support is a complicated dance that consists of a number of coordinated steps and movements. A good trip support company helps to aid operators to fly around the globe. A great trip support company becomes an extension of your flight department and coordinates movements like a trusted dance partner; we make sure that we handle all your requests swiftly and accurately, while having the know-how and forethought to be ready to identify unforeseen situations.

When you choose to use an international service provider, you are entrusting them with the safety, timeliness, and success of your trip. We take care of the aircraft, the crew, the passengers, the cargo, and everything in between.

International trips can be wildly complex; we must coordinate flight plans, weather and alternative plans, as well as obtain permits, arrange services and fuel, find

comfortable and safe accommodations, secure ground transportation, and mitigate risk.

Each of these activities involves many subtasks that require having a keen eye for detail. Once the specifics of each service are ironed out, we must then coordinate them with all the other pieces of the puzzle. For example, changing the departure time on a flight may affect the route, flight plan acceptances, permits, ground handling, and fuelling, as well as hotel, and ground transportation arrangements.

Clients of all sizes – including both those with robust dispatch offices and those who rely on the pilots to handle all the work – are equally candidates for using a trip support provider.

We continually monitor the situation, provide services, offer alternatives, and carry out the active oversight of your entire trip. Every flight department – regardless of size or capability – can benefit from the protective and resourceful layers that a trip support company provides.

**AH: Can you go into some detail concerning the various services that Prime Trip Support provides?**

**JA:** We typically view an international trip as a series of services that work in concert. I will break those down into headings.



**1. Flight Planning & Weather:** These services include the route generation, route analysis, flight optimisation for fuel, time, and ride comfort (turbulence).

We work with the authorities around the world to generate and file optimal routings, while making sure there are no issues with weather, safety, or geopolitical concerns. Once we identify a safe, expeditious route, we then make sure the flight plan is on file with the appropriate authorities and provide our clients with a level of comfort when ATC clears their route “as filed”.

**2. Permits & Regulatory:** Once we have identified an acceptable route of flight, we then must liaise with each country and authority across the entire flight spectrum to obtain the necessary permissions (overflight, landing, slots, etc.) to operate.

We must analyze the route, the operator, the type of flight, aircraft equipage, the payload, and various other factors to make sure we obtain the appropriate clearances for the given route. Sometimes, we must liaise with over 10+ separate entities to obtain these approvals.

In addition to permits, we must ensure that all departure and arrival regulations are followed, including filing APIS reports, regulatory forms, and other items.

**3. Ground Handling:** When we have the flight plan ironed out, we arrange and oversee all ground operations, including aircraft handling, crew and passenger handling, and payload/cargo handling.

We must make sure that the airport and airport facilities are acceptable for the operation being performed. We dispatch ramp agents to oversee everything from the handling of people and baggage, cargo, aircraft services, airport movements, parking, catering, and much more.

We can provide access to on-board CIQ procedures and VIP lounges and FBOs in many places. Our goal is to provide the highest level of service on the ground, regardless of where you are operating. Clients should feel that they are in good hands the entire time they are in-country.

**4. Fuel:** Prime can arrange fuel anywhere, anytime. We work closely with our suppliers to provide quality fuel (including sustainable fuel for those who wish to go that route) at discount prices.

Not only must we arrange fuel, we make sure the fuel is provided when and where the client wants to fuel. Prime makes sure we match the correct suppliers with the ramps and handlers where the client is operating.

We have seen many operators choose to arrange their own fuel only to find out when they are at the airport that they selected a fuel provider who is unable (or unwilling) to fuel the aircraft because of its location on the ramp, its type of flight designation, or any of a number of other factors.

**5. Ground Transportation:** Once the crew and passengers have arrived at the airport, they need safe and reliable transportation to their end destination, whether it be a hotel, restaurant, or business meeting.



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Prime works closely with trusted providers around the globe to ensure that transportation is provided by safe and reliable vehicles and drivers. Whether it is a sedan, or bus, or armored transport with a security-trained driver, we make sure to arrange the correct level of transportation based on the client's needs and the overall situation on the ground.

Our ground transportation network is vetted in a multi-point review procedure; we make sure that you know who your driver is, the make of your vehicle and that your on-ground itinerary is safe and solid.

**6. Hotels:** By taking advantage of our economies-of-scale, Prime can provide a number of discounted hotels and accommodations for clients at all budget levels. Often, we arrange different hotels for the passengers and the crew. Prime also arranges private tours, show tickets, and handles many special requests for our clients.

**7. Risk Mitigation:** Prime identifies the client's mission, including where they are going, reviewing any credible threats against the crew, passengers, and aircraft, and offers services commensurate with the level of exposure. Risk mitigation spans several services, including pre-trip intelligence briefs, aircraft guards, personal security, armored transportation, secure transportation with security-trained drivers, emergency extractions, and Kidnap-and-Ransom insurance.

**8. Charter (Supplemental Lift):** Whether it is a helicopter transfer to a rooftop within the city for a business meeting or sourcing a different airplane for specific missions or if there are AOG scenarios, Prime is often tasked with obtaining supplemental lift for our clients. Our network is robust, complete with many options that are not publicly listed for charter.

I would also add that we break tasks down into three phases: pre-flight, enroute, and post-flight. We provide oversight for all the above elements for all three phases. For example, we don't just set up services and consider them complete. We set up services, we confirm services, and we reconfirm services again to make sure all goes according to plan.

Prime provides a complete flight watch service that oversees all aspects of the trip. When you are on your way to the airport, we are with you. During the flight, we are with you. And after you land, we are with you. Prime is an extension of your flight department – plain and simple - providing that extra set of eyes and hands to ensure mission success with exceptional quality along the way.

**AH: How does Prime deal with matters such as key staff acquisition and staff training?**

**JA:** Prime Trip Support is a service provider. In fact, one of the main reasons we started the company is because we felt that the industry was starting to see some significant erosion in terms of service quality. One of our goals is to put "service" back in "service provider." This starts with an unrelenting determination to provide exceptional services, which is shared by each and every person on the team. When it comes to being a service provider, a company's greatest asset is the team – the people who work together in concert to make sure our clients receive an incredible level of service every step of the way.

Prime takes pride in our talent acquisition process. We look for persons with the right attitude, who are adept at problem-solving, and have a desire to be the best every single day. Finding people who fit these criteria can be challenging. Once we feel we have identified the right candidates, we employ a number of comprehensive and personality tests, as well as involving the entire team in the hiring process.





  
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We look for candidates that are “in it for the long haul.” Our retention rate of team members is high for our industry; turnover is almost non-existent. Once a new member joins the team, they are put into a comprehensive training program for their position. This is heavily focused on the need to provide excellent customer service and aligning with the company’s promise to exceed client expectations.

The team goes through recurrent training monthly, where subject matter experts on the team are eager to share their ideas, procedures, and know-how to other team members. For demographics purposes, the “average” – there is nothing average about them – operations specialist has 5+ years of experience in trip support, speaks 2+ languages, holds a dispatch or pilot’s license, and is 100% committed to providing exemplary service.

**AH: I was impressed that the company can organise refuelling at over 3,000 global locations. How is that achieved and how do you make it easy for pilots and owners to book and pay for fuel services?**

**JA:** There are several resources for clients to procure and

arrange fuel around the globe. And it is all too easy for this to be done incorrectly. We often see clients who set up their own fuel arrangements arriving at airports with a fuel card or fuel release in hand, assured of their discounted pricing. What they often discover though is that it is not that simple. They may be told that their card or fuel release cannot be accepted. They may not be on the proper ramp for the given payment method or supplier, or they may have to wait indefinitely for their fuelling to take place because the supplier is tending to other aircraft.

All these scenarios lead to frustration, especially those that cause operational delays or result in higher prices than expected. When Prime arranges fuel, we pay very close attention to the type of flight, the requested quantities, requested additives (like PRIST, etc.), current fuel supply, and the proper coordination between the ground handler and fuel supplier.

We issue fuel releases to the client, the handler (FBO), and the fuel supplier. Not only do we make sure the crew will not be



asked for payment on site, but we also oversee the entire fuel operation. We make sure our clients are fuelled efficiently at the rate promised, as well as at the time and location requested.

**TH: How do you deal with concierge-type services?**

**JA:** First and foremost, we take the view that information is free. Prime believes that international service providers should equip clients with information about their proposed (and ongoing trips) as a matter of course, not as an exception. Our clients quickly become accustomed to treating us as an extension of their flight department, sharing details and concerns in the early stages of the trip to ensure there are no surprises down the road. They do so with the confidence that they aren't going to be "nickel-and-dimed" for sharing such information or making requests.

Because we are laser focused on providing a two-way flow of information and we dedicate resources to completely oversee of all three phases of the trip, we are often elected to provide many ancillary services. Show tickets, tours, special requests for catering, event planning, and much more are often the norm.

We are frequently involved in aircraft importations and exportations, and we source and supply parts and labour for aircraft maintenance requests. If you need a service, Prime is here to get it done for you. Sometimes the requests are strictly concierge in nature; we'll relay messages to loved ones for in-flight crews, update ground stakeholders of a trip's progress (when the crew asks us to do so), and make dinner reservations. Need a SIM card for your phone on arrival? We've got you covered.

**AH: What of your future plans for the company? How do you see things progressing over the next few years?**

**JA:** Our goal is to be prepared for whatever curveballs the industry throws us, as well as being prepared to adapt quickly to change. We will continue to identify global hotspots, destinations with increasing traffic, and strategic locations, so that we can plan accordingly and provide top-notch services. Prime will continue to grow our geographical footprint with expanded office locations staffed with industry professionals and solution-makers. Our catalogue of solutions will continue to grow, as will our commitment to providing exceptional services. **|BAM**

“ Prime will continue to grow our geographical footprint with expanded office locations staffed with industry professionals and solution-makers.”



Renderings courtesy of  
Massari Design



# FORGING AHEAD

James Feulner, Administration & Human Resources Leader, and his colleagues, talk about how Citadel has developed and grown over the last year

**Q:** Citadel is now a well-established part of the Louisiana business world. Let's talk about how things have come on since the launch and what has happened to consolidate Citadel's place in the community.

**James Feulner:** Citadel has engaged in

partnerships with Louisiana LED Fast Start Program and our neighbour at SOWELA Technical College with the FAA A&P Program. We have funded an internal scholarship program for Citadel's uncertified technicians to attend SOWELA and test through documented on-the-job training, while getting paid by Citadel.

**Q: How has the hiring gone so far? Let talk a bit about the highly demanding and technical nature of both completions and MRO, about the range of skills required, the ease or difficulty of finding those skills in Citadel's immediate environment, what Citadel is looking for by way of culture and attitude, as well as aptitude from new signings. I'd like to look a bit here at the management challenges of "bedding in" new hires so that they become part of the Citadel family, as it were.**

**JF:** Hiring for everyone has been a challenge and we expect it will continue to be for several years. We are always searching for the right talent and diamonds in the rough.



“We are always searching for the right talent and diamonds in the rough.”

We look for positive attitude and integrity first, and then find the right place in the organization. We are expanding our Learning and Development Team with a focus on enhancing our onboarding and continuing the employee's development as their career progresses. I cannot underestimate the importance of the “soft-skills” and the team-building mission of our group and how that carries itself throughout our organization.

**Q: What is Citadel doing in its local area to support the locality and the local community?**

**JF:** Some of the great things that are happening in the Lake Charles area are being driven by the local Chamber of Commerce and the Just Imagine Southwest Louisiana in partnership with the SWLA Community Foundation. They have 10 major projects on the board and where Citadel is looking to partner is on the Greenbelt Bayou initiative. Where we can participate is through fund raising and our team participating in the creation of a greenbelt around Lake Charles with walking and bike trails around the city.



James Feulner

Administration & Human Resources Leader



### Noel Christen, Vice President of Operations

**Q:** Let's talk about the MEBA announcement of Citadel joining the Airbus partnership and what this means.

**Noel Christen:** Citadel's expertise and dynamic team align well with ACJ's efforts to expand its presence and support both domestically in the United States, as well as, abroad.



### Michelle Savoy, Director of Marketing

**Q:** How much success is Citadel having in getting the word out, at events such as the Monaco Yacht show? What are the expectations from this? We could talk here about Citadel's approach to the major trade shows generally, how they fit in, what Citadel's experience of them has been so far, and so on.

**Michelle Savoy:** We are keen on strategic partnerships to



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“We continue to strengthen and enhance our MRO-heavy Mx backbone to support our current and future clients.”

push our message and brand across various business sectors and the Aviation Industry and this year it has worked out well in our favor. The Monaco Yacht Show (“MYS”) is pivotal to the super and mega yacht industry for the UHNW. Our designers work both in the world of Yachting and Private Aviation, and these shows are opportunities to network and build our presence. We get to lean on the expertise of the yacht world professionals for their unique creativity and collaborate with them to bring special elements into V/VIP aircraft to create exquisite interiors.

For our industry-related Tradeshow's, we position the company in the best way possible for our brand and the highest ROI, may it be a Chalet at the Dubai Airshow, MEBAA, or NBAA. Our goals are always to create meaningful and impactful relationships with our clients and create special experiences. We use a variety of strategies and partnerships across the spectrum to achieve this, some conventional and some that are completely customised and unique.

Renderings courtesy of  
Massari Design



### Jack Smith, Director of Maintenance

**Q: How have things gone on the MRO side?**

**Jack Smith:** Things have gone very well in the MRO part of our business this calendar year. We have supported Pylon MODS, Triple Gear Changes, ENG replacements for multiple fleet. We continue to strengthen and enhance our MRO-heavy Mx backbone to support our current and future clients.

**Q: What can you tell us about the Boeing 767 project that was delivered back in July?**

**JS:** The 767 that visited in July, was that of a VIP customer. The aircraft underwent a Phase 3 Check heavy maintenance visit. Ironically, that very aircraft is currently in-house for an A Check and will be redelivered ahead of schedule to our client. |BAM





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# COMMS FOR ALL

Chris Moore, President of Satcom Direct, talks to Jane Stanbury, BAM Global Luxury Travel Correspondent, about SD's advances in its Plane Simple® antenna series

**JS: 2022 was a significant year for your Plane Simple® antenna series. Can you tell us more about where the hardware development is at?**

**CM:** Yes, the last twelve months have seen us take our first antenna, our Ku-band tail-mount variant, from DO-160 certification into extensive in-service evaluation on customer aircraft. The reception has been even better than we anticipated, with the system proving to be as consistent and reliable as we developed it to be.

It links flawlessly with the Intelsat FlexExec network. On a recent demo flight on the SD G550, we had 45 devices simultaneously streaming, video conferencing, talking, and

supporting multiple applications. The system didn't even waver; that's how powerful it is. STCs have been generated with our MRO and OEM partners for all major aircraft types, and we already have demand from more than 100 owners and operators. Commercial service introduction in Q1 2023 will make consistent, cost-effective, customisable connectivity available to more owners and operators than ever before.

**JS: That's just the first antenna, but you have more hardware planned?**

**CM:** The SD Plane Simple antenna series currently consists of two tail-mount variants and a flat panel antenna, all of which only need two line-replaceable units to operate



- the SD modem unit and the antenna - which are linked by minimal cables. In addition to the Ku-band tail mount variant, we added the prototype Ka-band variant to our Gulfstream G550 in December. This is now being tested across the Inmarsat Jet ConneX network as we effectively repeat the same testing phases as we did with the first terminal. We'll fly the aircraft, collect data, and feed that back to the design team, which will make final tweaks before we move to the customer evaluation phase. We anticipate it will be commercially available by the end of 2023.

This variant further demonstrates our commitment to creating products that customers can optimise for years to come. The antenna has been designed to function with all the next-generation satellites that Inmarsat is adding to its constellation; it's just one example of how we're delivering future-proof technology.

The third antenna is a flat-panel fuselage-mounted antenna. It is an electronically steered phased array (ESA) terminal that links with the OneWeb LEO constellation. It's lightweight, scalable and supports light to large cabin business aircraft.

What's really exciting is that owners of Phenom 300/Citation X-size aircraft will, for the first time, have access to all the benefits of Ku-band connectivity.

**JS: So the SD jet has two antennas on the tail now?**

**CM:** Yes, and with the installation of the second antenna, we're introducing the option of having dual dissimilar connectivity. This allows customers to have redundant Satcom systems on the aircraft but at a much-reduced weight and footprint and with minimal installation. The two variants provide both redundant and disparate network connectivity, as the antennas can switch between systems to guarantee consistent coverage. For an optimal connectivity experience, the terminals can also operate concurrently. In addition, the onboard SD Router® can configure the network to ensure different users or groups of users can access the bandwidth they need.

**JS: You announced at MEBA a an agreement with Stellar Blu; what does this bring to the SD portfolio?**

**CM:** Stellar Blu supplies next-generation satellite communications technology, including the Sidewinder ESA



**“** SD places the customer at the heart of all we do.”

terminal, which is designed to retrofit executive airliners. We’re selling and activating the airtime, providing cybersecurity and additional value-added services for Sidewinder terminal customers. The terminal supports connectivity to Ku-band airtime networks and, once installed, gives business airliners with heavy passenger loads bolstered connectivity. Teleconferencing is the norm now for these aircraft types, this is data hungry, but the Sidewinder solution reduces latency. It is a good complement to our own antenna series.

Stellar Blu will begin in-service evaluation of the Sidewinder ESA terminal in Q2 2023, then STCs for Airbus, Boeing, and Embraer airframes will follow. The terminal is currently being type-approved on the OneWeb network, with commercial service introduction expected before the end of 2023.

**JS: That’s a lot of new technology for customers to get to grips with. How do you prepare your team to support the customers?**

**CM:** SD places the customer at the heart of all we do. In addition to connectivity, we add value through our eco-system of infrastructure, hardware, airtime, software, ground infrastructure, and cybersecurity protection. We aim to enhance the ownership experience and improve operational efficiencies, we really do connect customers beyond all expectations. This activity is all underpinned by our awesome customer support team.

With the new products coming online, we’re growing our team to continue delivering 24/7/365 support globally. Once

someone begins working with SD, they receive basic 101 training and subsequently train for their area of expertise, whether for our NOCs (network operations centres), sales and account management, cybersecurity services or product support. This is a real benefit to our clients.

Education is big for us at SD, so we also provide training to our customers. Our Entry into Service program is thorough. Customers can be trained at their site, visit one of our training facilities, or have one of our team fly with them to demonstrate how to maximise the systems on wing. Our Connecting with Customers (CwC) customer appreciation events are designed to update users with the latest technology and partner developments in a dedicated



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**“**Our FlightDeck Freedom® datalink service is evolving and is now the default datalink system for in-production Gulfstream G500, G600, and G650ER aircraft. It’s much more than just a datalink system. It keeps the entire flight department and crew synched for more efficient flight operations.”

environment. We really focus on ensuring customers get the very best connectivity experience possible.

#### JS - What else is SD focusing on?

CM: Our FlightDeck Freedom® datalink service is evolving and is now the default datalink system for in-production Gulfstream G500, G600, and G650ER aircraft. It’s much more than just a datalink system. It keeps the entire flight department and crew synched for more efficient flight operations. FDF provides critical data to support service monitoring and plays a significant part in communicating dynamic situational changes during flight. It can also be configured to support secure, reliable datalink services between the crew, air traffic control, and ground personnel. Like all our products, it’s built on open architecture design. In the case of FDF, this allows third-party integration, including trip planning and risk management tools.



We know our aviation customers depend on timely information exchanges to keep operations running efficiently. So, in the same way that cell phones connect to the best service provider to ensure continuity, we have integrated FDF with the ARINC datalink network. The integration enhances connectivity for flight deck communications across the globe, ensuring that FDF and ARINC users can easily access data for more efficient operations no matter where they are. The aggregation delivers more flight-deck functionality, including expanded VHF coverage in several regions, including Asia.

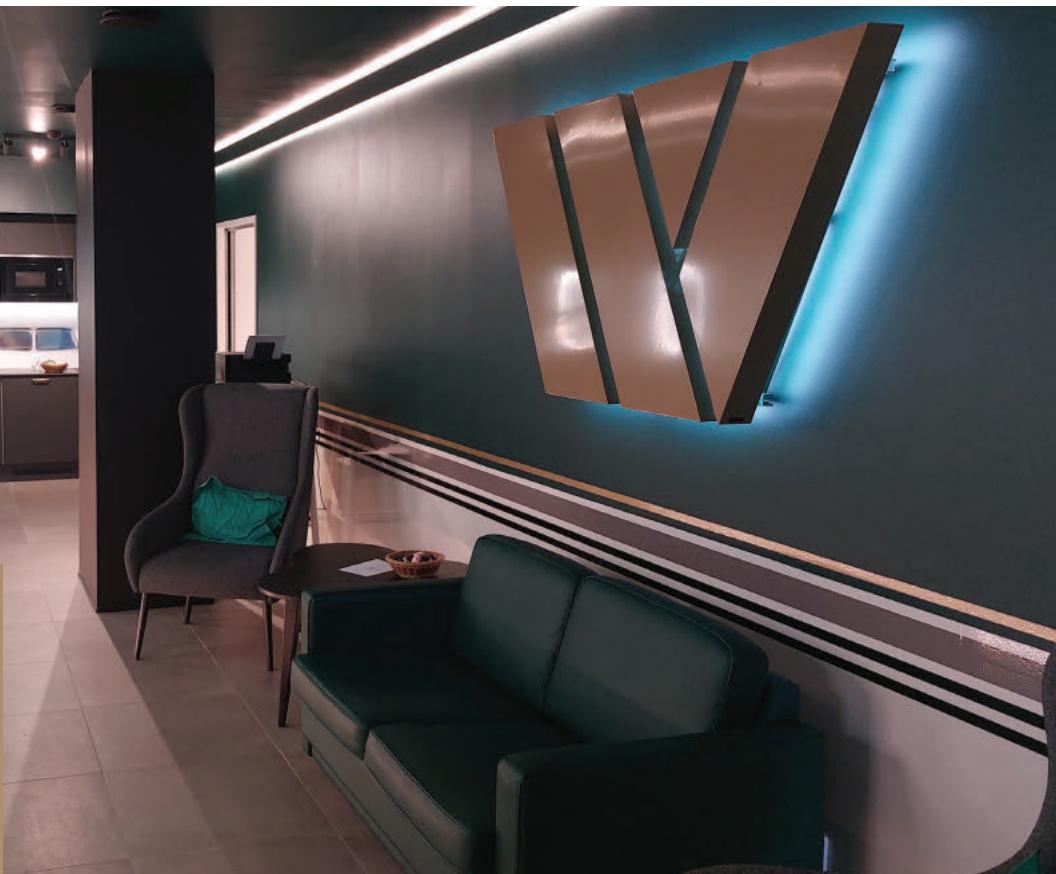
Our operating system SD Pro® is also undergoing some changes. From early next year, SD Pro will allow users to schedule individual legs of a multi-leg journey. This will give the flight department more control over all aspects of their trip. We keep advancing our connectivity technology to better support our customers; that’s what drives us. **|BAM**



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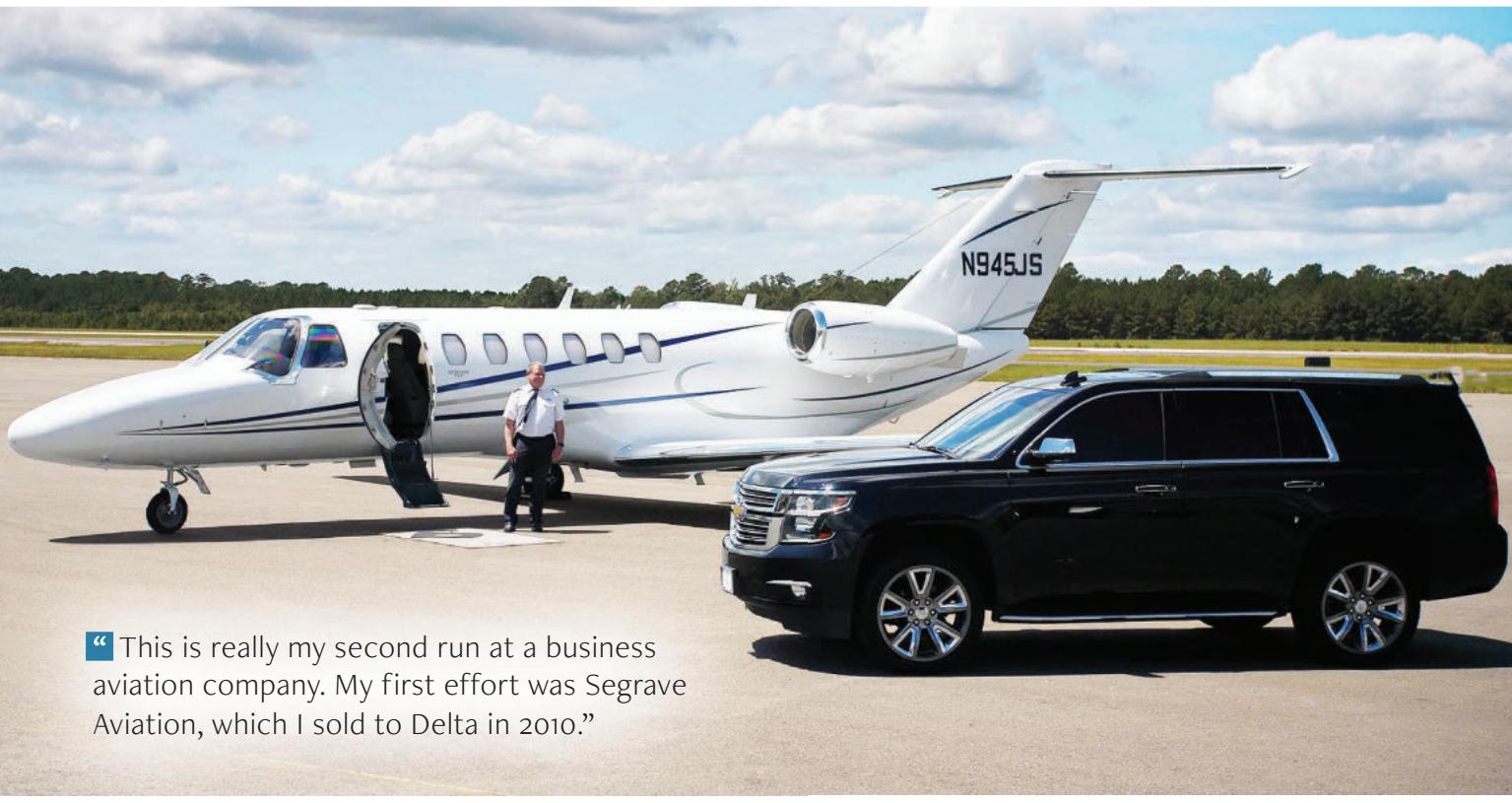
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**“**This is really my second run at a business aviation company. My first effort was Segrave Aviation, which I sold to Delta in 2010.”

# BUILDING THE BEST

Jim Segrave, Chairman, founder, and CEO of flyExclusive, talks to Anthony Harrington about building a top private jet operation

## INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina-based flyExclusive is one of North America's five largest private jet operators. LGM Enterprises, LLC, the parent company of flyExclusive, wholly owned by Segrave, is one of the largest privately held companies in North Carolina, ranked number 61 in 2021. The company employs over 800 people with estimated 2022 annual revenues of over \$350 million. The company operates a fleet of 90 jets and is the second largest operator of Citation Jets in the world.

### Q: Jim, what led you to found flyExclusive back in 2015?

JS: This is really my second run at a business aviation company. My first effort was Segrave Aviation, which I sold to Delta in 2010. That sale had a five-year ‘no compete’ clause, so as soon as that clause timed out, I launched flyExclusive. My idea was that I could capitalise on everything I had learned in my first effort, with the benefit of a very strong supply-demand imbalance in private aviation!

### Q: What were the challenges in growing flyExclusive to its present position in just seven years?

JS: We have been very fortunate in being able to grow the business relatively quickly. Part of the key to this is that we were very well funded from the outset. This is a capital-intensive business as you know, and to grow you have to be well-funded, at a minimum. I reinvested all the proceeds of that sale to Delta and that has been a big factor in getting us to where we are today.

What has also been important for me is that I have never had any private equity partners in the business. There are just my four children, who each own shares. What is new, however, is that we signed an agreement to take the company public through a SPAC, or Special Purpose Acquisition Company.

### Q: Were you familiar with SPACs as an alternative to the more conventional IPO (Initial Public Offering) route as a way to take a company public?

JS: There are some great advantages for us in going





the SPAC route. It is an efficient way to raise capital and not sacrifice operational control, which is critical in this business. A SPAC also allows me to invest further in the quality of the experience we offer to our customers which is ultimately aligned with how we expect to generate durable returns for investors.

I want to build a business to hand on to the next generation. One of the problems with raising money through private equity is that those funds need to eventually exit via the sale of the business. There is no inevitable liquidation event with this SPAC so that really aligns with what I want to do with the business, and where I want the business to be situated, which is right here in North Carolina. At the same time, it provides me with the capital to take the business to the next level.

**Q: What can you tell us about the flyExclusive approach and business model?**

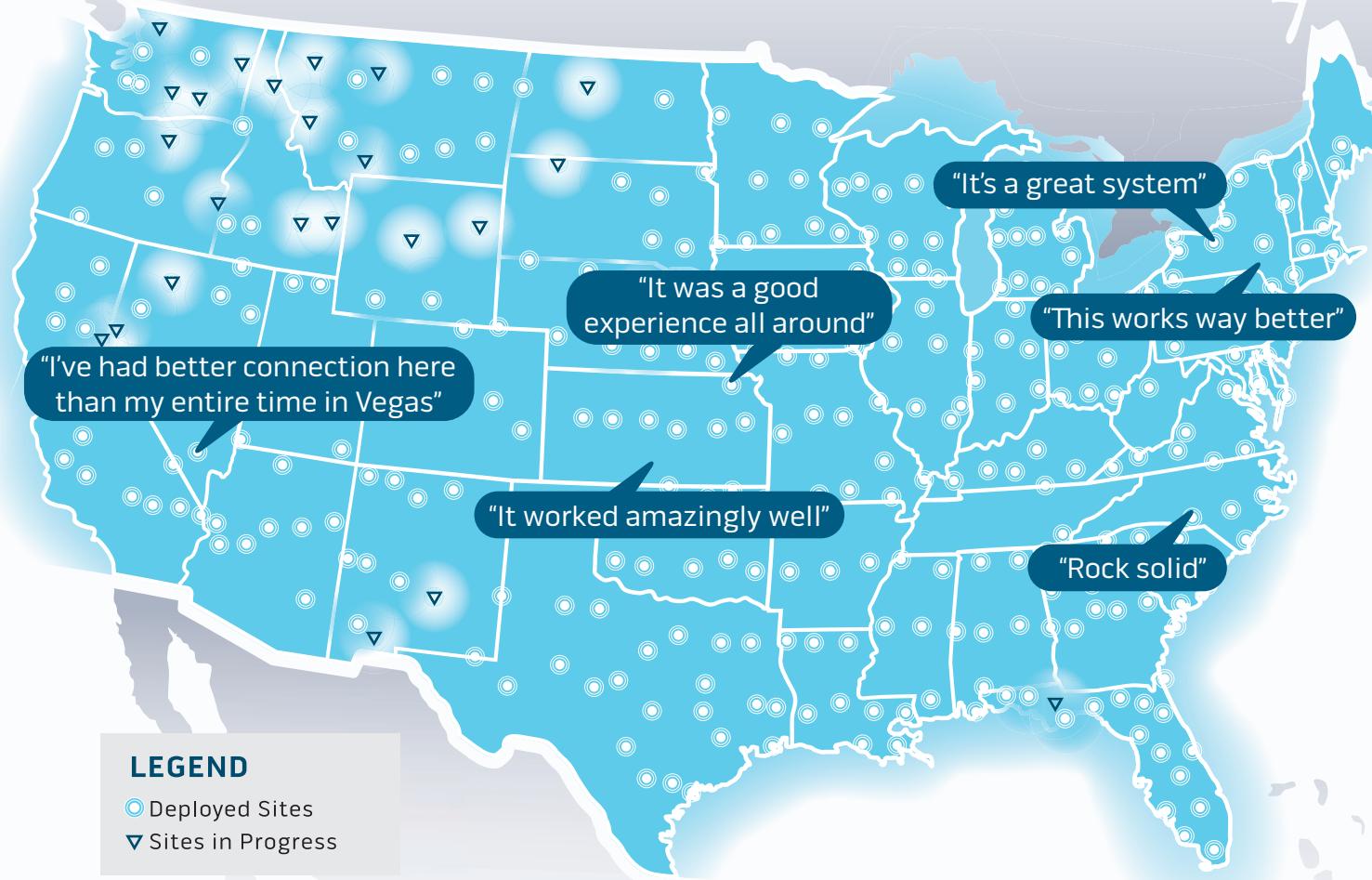
JS: Customers have multiple ways to access our fleet. They can opt for our partnership arrangement; they can be fractional members, or they can be part of our membership club. We also have wholesale customers and a limited amount of retail business. The wholesale part of the business is through brokers, where we supply some of their demand for aircraft for their clients.

In 2019, our business was completely wholesale. Since then, we've built our customer base from 100% ad hoc to be nearly 80% contractual, committed demand. In 2020, we introduced the Jet Club. Currently, we have more than 600 members and were recognised with the Robb Report's "Best of the Best" Jet Club award in 2022. Our Guaranteed Revenue

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“Customers have multiple ways to access our fleet. They can opt for our partnership arrangement; they can be fractional members, or they can be part of our membership club.”



Program (“GRP”) customers, our fractional owners, and our partners round out our contractual, committed demand, and we utilise these valued relationships to build a leading platform to service all customer types within the private aviation industry. Lead times among our customer channels are key for us as we work to optimise demand while maintaining control of the customer experience. We fly 99.6% of our customers on our fleet, which reinforces our commitment to customer fulfilment on our fleet rather than third-party reliance.

**Q: How does your fractional programme work?**

JS: Customers can join our fractional programme at a starting rate of just 50 hours a year for a share of a New Citation CJ3. All our programmes are based on the notion of a daily and hourly rate which varies depending on the size of the aircraft you are buying, and the size of the deposit you put in place to support your flying. These rates are very competitively priced for two-hour, five-hour and six-hour trips, and means that we do not have to concern ourselves with very short trips, like a 30-minute leg.





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**“**We are always looking for the best people. This is one of the great benefits of being well-capitalised. It enables us to continue to invest in the best people at all levels.”

A lot of our customers will buy two or more cards or club programs. They might buy one card for their trips to the coast, and a different card for those long, cross-country trips. This was one of the prime reasons why we won the “Best of the Best” award from the Robb Report for 2022, for the best structured private flight programme.

**Q: You have some very ambitious growth plans, including a plan to greatly expand your MRO operation. What is the thinking here?**

JS: We took a hard look at the amount of money we were spending on outsourcing MRO all around the country. By bringing the vast majority of that work back in-house, and going for a much more vertically integrated business, we gain a tremendous amount of control over our own fate, as it were.

Yes, it means we are having to greatly expand our headcount and hire a large number of technicians to work on the aircraft, but it massively improves our dispatch reliability and saves us

money. We are now looking to use this in-house expertise and capability to win third-party MRO business.

**Q: The success of your business shows that you are clearly doing a number of things right. What do you put your business acumen down to?**

JS: Perhaps the first point to make is that I have made a lot of mistakes along the way, and I had excellent mentors. I come from a very entrepreneurial family background. I am the sixth generation of our family business, which is one of the oldest farming businesses in North Carolina. We've had all sorts of farming businesses, from John Deere tractor dealerships to concrete and bottling businesses. So, I'd done a bit of everything and I was exposed to an entrepreneurial environment from a very young age.

**Q: What is your approach to recruitment for flyExclusive?**

JS: We are always looking for the best people. This is one of the great benefits of being well-capitalised. It enables us to



continue to invest in the best people at all levels, particularly as far as the senior leadership team is concerned. I always want to surround myself with folks who are a lot smarter than me and who can complement my weaknesses.

We have a tremendous family business here and that gives us a unique attractiveness. It is a good part of the reason why we have been able to recruit great people and get ahead of our competition. This was one of the things that made the SPAC so attractive to me. It will enable us to maintain our culture and it secures my directional control of the business. The company plans to list sometime in Q2 2022.

I am particularly proud of the fact that we are building a world-class MRO operation, including a state-of-the-art paint shop and interior shop. Already we have painted and refurbished 60% of our own aircraft. We've hired around 150 technicians over the last six months.

We have the capacity to provide MRO services 24 hours a day and we are looking forward to offering this service to other aircraft owners and operators. We've already increased our dispatch availability by bringing this work in-house, which makes it a very easy decision to grow the MRO side of our operation. |BAM



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# THE KEY TO GREATNESS

Aino Grapin, CEO of Winch Design, on the company's successes and ambitions for 2023

**Q: Let's begin with a brief history of Winch Design.**

**AG:** Winch Design is an international, multi-disciplinary studio, specialising in the bespoke design of superyachts, architecture, private jets and interiors. The studio was founded in 1986 by Andrew Winch and his wife, Jane, and now comprises some 150 talented individuals.

We create dream homes on land, in the air and at sea for a discreet and elite client base. Over the past 36 years, the team has designed and delivered iconic projects all over the globe that are not only timeless but have altered the trajectory of UHNW design into the future.

**Q: What of your own history, Aino? What was the route to your present position?**

**AG:** My career has been rather diverse. However, there has been a common thread running through it, which I define as providing business leadership in a creative space.

I started off as a strategy consultant at Bain & Co, before moving to the auction and fine art world where I spent the majority of my career. First, at Christie's in a variety of strategic and operational roles, including my last role as International Business Director in the Russian Art department.



Excellence Winch Design

I then went from a 250-year-old established company to a tech disruptor start-up, Paddle8. I led the expansion of this New York based online auction house in Europe and the Middle East, before joining Winch Design. It was a natural

step: our projects are so unique and intricately designed that they are like works of art in their own right.

When I joined Winch Design as CEO in 2016, it was my first

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experience in the aviation and superyacht industry. In the first year, I had a lot to learn from Andrew and the rest of the Senior Leadership Team and six years later, I continue to learn something new each day!

**Q: How did the company fare through the pandemic and the resulting lockdown?**

**AG:** Generally, the private aviation space boomed during the pandemic, as people sought out safer ways to travel. However, when looking at the aviation market that we cover, it is important to differentiate between the wide-body/narrow-body sector and the business jet sector.

In general terms, green narrow and wide-body aircraft projects being fitted out with a full bespoke VIP interior are few and far between, due to the vast scale and cost of such projects. That said, during the pandemic, we delivered a fully VIP 787 Dreamliner and an Airbus ACJ320. Currently, we are working on a BBJ Max 9 due for delivery in 2024.

However, the business jet market is much broader than this segment, and we're really seeing the demand for these projects grow. Just last month we delivered a full interior refit of a Global 5000 and we have a Global 6000 on the drawing board at the moment. The US is the hottest market for business jet interiors.

Some of the studio's signature work includes delivering the first fully private Dreamliner, a Falcon 7X jet with an exterior inspired by Van Gogh's, 'A Starry Night', and an Airbus

Global 5000  
Winch Design



ACJ319 with a gentleman's club-inspired interior featuring a classic period style library with a hidden door into the master suite.

**Q: Winch deals with several markets. Can you take us through your experiences outside the business jets arena?**

**AG:** Winch Design remains one of the world's foremost custom yacht designers, with projects ranging from small sailboats to 100-metre-plus superyachts.

Among many significant projects delivered by the team are the 133 metre Al Mirqab, the Lurssens Tis, Phoenix 2 and

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Ace, the Feadships Madame Gu and Sea Owl, CMN-built Slipstream and Cloud 9 and the Abeking & Rasmussen-built Excellence. We also delivered the sailing superyachts, Cyclos III, Prevail, Alitha and several Jeanneau series.

We are also very strong in architecture and interiors. In the architecture division, alongside a number of highly confidential projects, the team has recently delivered the L'Escale Resort Marina & Spa in the Seychelles, a cliffside residence in South Africa, a townhouse in New York and a recording studio in Antwerp.

**Q: What is the key to great designs? Clearly, the design needs to please the client at the end of the day, but who guides it, the client or the designer?**

**AG:** We believe in comfort, adventure and possibility, in freedom of exploration and freedom of vision. We've developed a design philosophy that is unconstrained by a 'house style' – but instead is a reflection of the client and their character.

The environment of an aircraft is a very unique space, however. It is different from any other kind of space that interior designers typically work on. This is due to factors such as the limited space on offer, the very real constraints imposed by weight restrictions, and, of course, the fixed cylinder shape with a lack of natural light.

As a consequence, the initial design requirements for an aircraft are very demanding because at the end of the design process the passenger has to feel good within the cabin environment and forget about all of these limitations.

We bring the client's lifestyle into the flying experience – this is always our starting point. The industry regulations pose lots of challenging restrictions for the designer, but we thrive on finding solutions by approaching these restrictions from a different viewpoint, by using our broad knowledge of other disciplines. And by doing so we create individual, unique designs for each client.

**Q: How important is technology to the process, i.e. the ability to generate lifelike renderings of potential designs?**

AG: This is incredibly important. We have an in-house CGI team, consisting of 10 talented individuals who bring our client's dreams to life through the use of still images, animations and virtual reality.

Our computer-generated images are both hyper-realistic and dimensionally accurate, combining the most advanced digital lighting techniques with detailed textures and materials to offer clients a photo-realistic insight into their dream interiors.

The average image takes 2.5 days to create, so a lot of work goes into each project. Depending on the size of the project, there could be up to 20 or 30 visuals.

**Q: How does Winch Design go about securing top talent?**

AG: We have a full-time in-house Head of Recruitment who spends a lot of time visiting universities, looking for the best talent. Winch Design has strong education links with Coventry University and Swansea University transport and design courses. We offer an internship programme which is open to talented students who reflect Winch's values and ethos.



In 2020/2021 we took on three interns from Coventry University and two from Solent University who have now become full-time employees. By investing in the next generation, we aim to create a thriving business, brimming with fresh creativity and knowledge.

We also have a scholarship set up with Kingston university where we fully fund the undergraduate fees for an economically disadvantaged student to study interior design at Kingston university. |BAM

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# CARVING OUT A UNIQUE POSITION

Anthony Caruso, Airport Director at Bangor International Airport, on a unique airport and its history

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Q

: let's begin with a brief history of the airport to the present time.

AC: Bangor International Airport began as “Godfrey Field” in 1927, on land owned by local attorney Edward Rawson Godfrey (1877-1958). Regular air passenger services to Portland and Boston began in 1931 by Boston-Maine Airways, owned by the Boston and Maine and Bangor and Aroostook railroads, but under contract to Pan American which was interested in the airport as one stop on its planned intercontinental air route between the US and Europe.

In 1940 Boston-Maine became Northeast Airlines, which eventually merged with Delta Airlines in 1972. Amelia Earhart was a celebrity

“ Today, BGR is stronger than ever.”





pilot on some of the earliest flights for Boston-Maine Airways in the 1930s. The airport was equipped with floodlights for night flights as early as 1937.

Just prior to the Second World War, Godfrey Field was taken over by the U.S. Army Air Corps and became the Bangor Army Air Field. Its mission was to serve as an embarkation point for military aircraft flying to Europe on the Great Circle Route. The name was changed to Dow Army Airfield in 1942, and in 1947, when the newly formed U.S. Air Force took control, it became Dow Air Force Base.

In 1958 the longest runway east of the Mississippi was constructed at Dow in order to accommodate B-52 bombers; the same runway that accommodates jet passenger aircraft today. In addition to strategic bombers, Dow was home to the 101st Fighter Wing, which, converted to a refueling wing, still shares space with the airport today, flying predominantly Boeing KC-135 Stratotankers. Some of the other military aircraft that regularly use the airport are McDonnell Douglas KC-10 Extenders and Boeing C-17 Globemasters.

In the 1950s and 60s, Bangor was a destination for Northeast Airlines before its merger into Delta. Northeast usually used the DC-6 for service between Bangor and Boston and New York. In 1965, there was still a single weekly DC-3 flight to Bangor operated by Northeast Airlines.



Dow was closed in 1968, but the base was purchased by the city of Bangor and reopened the following year as Bangor International Airport. From the 1970s into the 1990s the airport attracted 3,000-5,000 commercial flights a year, mostly charter jetliners flying between Europe and the West Coast of the United States, or the Caribbean and Mexico.

Bangor was a logical refueling stop, and as a U.S. Port of Entry, passengers could go through customs and immigration checks while their plane was being serviced. Travelers from every part of the world mingled in the airport lounge – from the French & Belgian contingents of the Elvis Presley Fan Club on their way to Memphis, to President Jose Lopez Portillo of Mexico on his way to Moscow with members of his military staff.

Laker Airways, World Airways, Balair, Condor Airlines, LTU International, Capital International Airways, Aeroflot and Pan American were a few of the companies whose livery became common in the skies above Bangor. Finnair briefly used Bangor as a hub for regularly scheduled daily flights.

Bangor has been the port of entry for over half a million servicemen and women returning from the First and Second Gulf Wars and the action in Bosnia on military charters. Starting in 1991, a combination of local veteran's groups and interested citizens formed themselves into troop greeters, to avoid the situation of the Vietnam War when soldiers returned without ceremony or greeting.

The civilian-driven ‘ceremony of return’ in Bangor has been well organized and often ebullient. On September 23, 2004, President George Bush boarded a plane carrying the troops of the 30th National Guard Brigade Combat Team as they stopped at Bangor International to refuel along their way to Iraq. In 2006, former President Bill Clinton spontaneously joined the line of troop-greeters when his private plane made a refueling stop.

In 2018, BGR celebrated its 50th anniversary!

Though COVID proved to be just as challenging for BGR as it did for most other airports on the travel side, we fared

“ Though COVID proved to be just as challenging for BGR as it did for most other airports on the travel side, we fared well with the cargo and military segments of our business.”

well with the cargo and military segments of our business. Domestic and international travel has returned and BGR remains stronger than ever in terms of passenger numbers handled by the four airlines – Allegiant, American, Delta and United – that serve the airport.

Today, BGR is stronger than ever and continues to provide the same great customer service our pilots, crews and passengers have come to expect and appreciate, whether on a domestic or private flight, or part of a military or cargo mission.



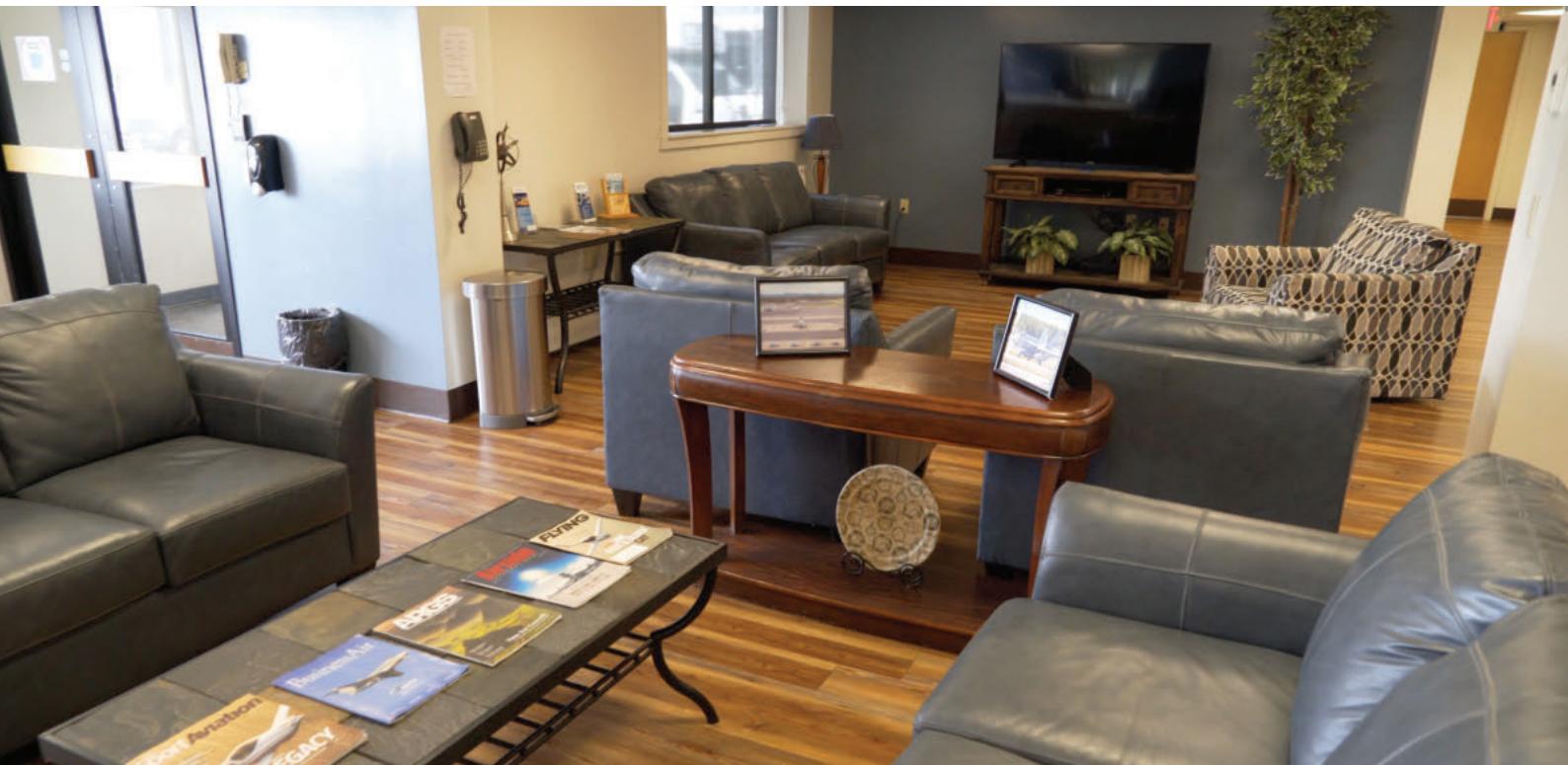


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**Q: We note the award from Ground Handling International, let's talk about the challenges in running an award-winning ground handling operation.**

AC: Just because you've seen one operation, certainly doesn't mean you've seen them all. We're honored to be recognised by our peers for our ground handling abilities, and all the credit truly goes to our team who has the expertise and ability to handle every operation – whether scheduled or a diversion – with speed, professionalism and care. Our team also goes beyond airport employees and extends to catering, emergency response, TSA and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

**Q: What can you tell us about your career and what led up to your appointment as Director?**

AC: I was appointed as the Bangor International Airport Director in July of 2012. I had previously served in multiple roles at BGR, having gotten my start in the aviation field in the department BGR is well known for – ground handling. I am no stranger to "slinging bags" and worked on the ramp for several years. Immediately prior to being named director, I served as the airport's assistant director.

In my current role, I am responsible for the management of our international, non-hub, commercial and military joint-use airport. I oversee the day to day operations of the airport, and am responsible for the budget, business development for the airport. I also participate in community outreach, and am the airport spokesperson. In addition to being an FAA licensed Private Pilot, I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Aviation Science with a concentration in Airport Management from

Bridgewater State University, and am a Certified Member of the American Association of Airport Executives.

BGR is fairly unique in that we are a municipally-owned airport and also own and operate our own FBO, which recently was rebranded to BGR Aviation. While this can prove to be challenging because of the vast amount of knowledge and training that our employees must obtain, we've been doing it for 50-plus years and consider it business as usual.

**Q: Let's talk a bit about Bangor's position as the first stop into the US on the Great Circle Route, and what that means in terms of safety, emergencies, diversions and so on.**

AC: As the first stop into the U.S. and the last stop out on the Great Circle Route, BGR has become known as go-to place for diversions, tech-stops and quick turns. With U.S. Customs and Border Protection headquarters on site, in addition to a runway and emergency services that can handle any aircraft currently flying, we frequently see a variety of aircraft on our ramp.

From small private charters to large international, cargo and military operations there are very few days that go by that we don't see some sort of unscheduled traffic. Our top-notch staff never bats an eye and is quick to react to whatever the situation is.

Whether a diversion be for medical or mechanical reasons, or simply because crews have timed out due to route changes stemming from political unrest (ie. The current situation in Russia and Ukraine) or weather, we've seen just about everything.



**Q: What of the general aviation component of the airport's activities?**

AC: While our FBO has a strong reputation among private pilots and charter operations, we have made a strong focus and investment in the last couple of years to strengthen our brand – renaming the FBO BGR Aviation from Bangor Aviation Services. In addition to the rebrand, we have renovated our FBO headquarters, improving the kitchen facility, conference area where pilots, crews and passengers can hold meetings if needed, and making sure our flight planning area is as convenient as possible. We also have made an investment in equipment in an effort to continue to provide the fastest and safest service possible when it comes to fueling, lavs, catering, and handling international trash.

Our Customer Service Representatives and ramp staff know many of our regular pilots, crews and passengers by name and anticipate their needs even before orders have been made or the aircraft arrives. We don't have all the flashy bells and whistles that some private FBOs provide, but that's not typically what our customers are looking for. They want to get in, clear customs and receive services, and get on their way to their final destination as quickly as possible.

If an aircraft does have a mechanical issue, we employ aircraft mechanics who are available 24/7. BGR is the airport that truly never sleeps and we're ready for whatever operation heads our way at a moment's notice. |BAM

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# CONTINUED GROWTH

Dr Fahad, the CEO and Founder of Saudia Private Aviation, talks to BAM about one of the region's premier business aviation companies

**Q: Dr Fahad, how did you get started in business aviation?**

**Dr F:** I started with Saudi Commercial Airlines as VP of Products and Marketing. After three years there, I moved sideways to become the CEO of Saudia Private Aviation (SPA) and I have held this position for the last four years.

We have had fantastic growth over the last three years, with SPA transforming into a well-rounded private aviation company, with a thriving FBO that offers clients a full concierge service along with all the support service you would expect from a top FBO. To understand this, you must realise that we started off strictly as an aircraft operator and have now progressed to a fully-fledged service provider to governments and to the private sector globally.

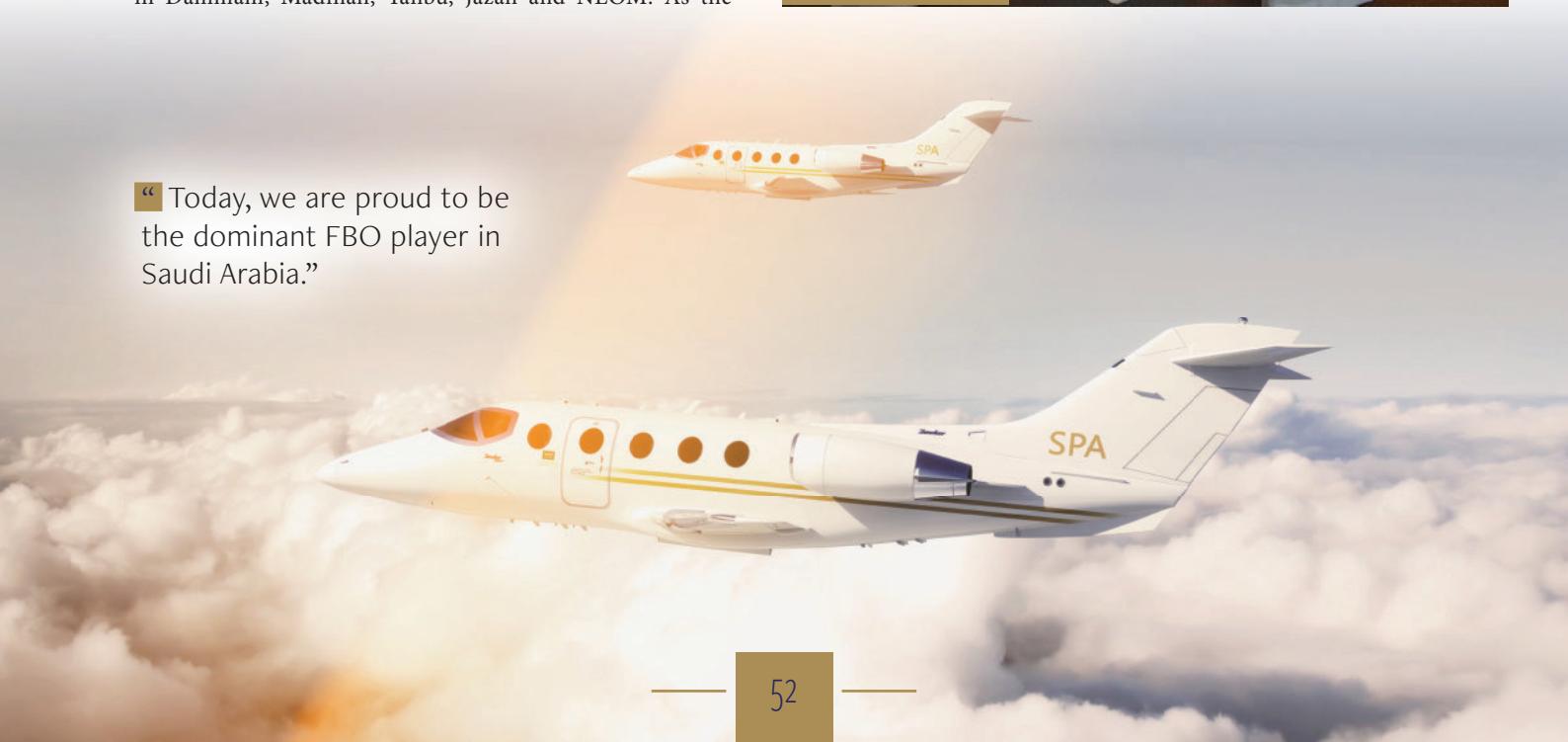
Today, we are proud to be the dominant FBO player in Saudi Arabia.

**Q: How many facilities does SPA now operate out of?**

**Dr F:** We have 7 locations where we operate as SPA, with Jeddah being our main hub, where we operate the bulk of our business, along with Riyadh, in addition to operations in Dammam, Madinah, Yanbu, Jazan and NEOM. As the



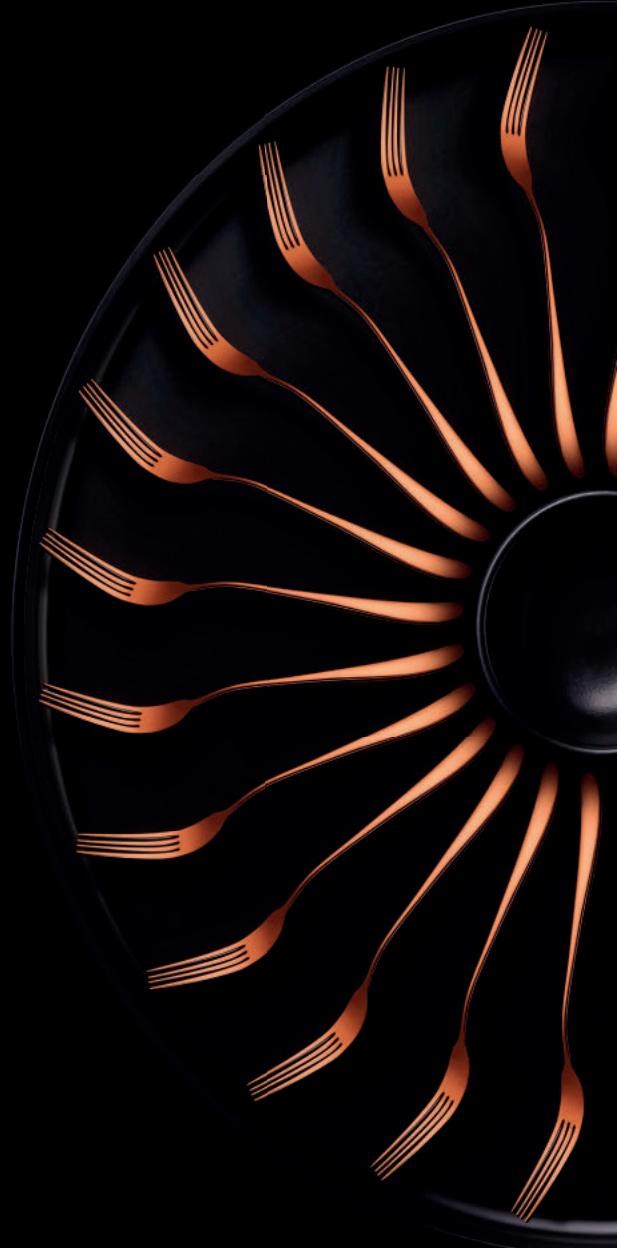
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provider of ground services to KSA, we have to be present wherever our client's aircraft fly to.

We are also available in all the military airbases, being a strategic partner of the Saudi Royal Airforce. We provide global flight support to their civilian aircraft.

**Q: You already have six different aircraft types in your fleet. What is your strategy there going forward?**

**Dr F:** We had a fleet of 10 aircraft, of which 4 were Falcon 7Xs for long-haul sectors and 6 Hawker 400X for short-haul flights. Unfortunately, we had to sell our fleet and keep one 400X to retain our AOC. The decision was necessary as the bulk of our demand used to be for shorter haul, thus rendering this type of aircraft unsuitable. We also had to reconsider continuing to operate the Beechcraft 400X in the harsh weather



conditions in this region. We sold five of them and kept one. We are in the process of receiving new aircraft from Embraer, which we expect to be delivered in the fourth quarter of 2023.

We are in discussion with a number of operators over leasing of their aircraft. Being a holder of GACAR part 121 SU operator certificate, we want to operate a mix of owned leased aircraft so that to broaden the appeal of our offering in the market and to capture more charter business.

We don't think that it is strategically necessary to own every aircraft that we operate. So, we are exploring with our partners the possibility of wet-leasing aircraft and perhaps testing the market. We have different seasons here, with the Hajj, we also have the Winter season now, which is a very recent occurrence here in Saudi Arabia. We have big promotions run by the Saudi Ministry of Tourism that attracts a lot of visitors to the Kingdom at certain times of the year. It is certainly our aim to develop services aimed at these opportunities by offering top-of-the-range business jets and even BBJs.

So, this is certainly something that we are considering. We will continue to be an aircraft operator while focusing too on our FBO operations.

**Q: Are you looking to expand beyond the borders of Saudi Arabia?**

**Dr F:** It is in the back of our mind. However, we operate

in a very big market. If you take companies that operate, for example, in Dubai, it is natural for them to seek to operate outside the Emirates because most of their business is in long-haul. In Saudi Arabia, we are lucky to have a big, thriving, domestic market that is geared to our vision for 2030.

So yes, we want to expand, but right now we are relying on third parties to help us meet the global demand that we experience from our customers. But yes, it is an attractive proposition to expand to the GCC and perhaps to Europe, to those key destinations that our clients fly to regularly. But that is a strategy for the future. It won't be about opening FBOs, but it will probably be about having aircraft with European registrations. Once we consolidate our domestic position, that will be up for consideration, perhaps in 18 to 24 months. We shall see.

**Q: How did the pandemic, which hit in 2020, affect your operations and plans?**

**Dr F:** We did see a drop but there was an upside to it. Obviously, commercial flights ceased, so most of the aircraft movements that happened were through SPA, via private charters. So, that side of the business kept going. In fact, we dealt with most of the evacuation flights into and out of the Kingdom, repatriating Saudis back to the Kingdom and flying European and US expatriates back to their home countries.

So, other than halting our expansion, in terms of pausing plans to buy further equipment, we did not feel too many ill effects. Most of our partners, however, completely shut down in the opening months of the pandemic. So even if we had wanted to continue our expansion, you could not get any clarity from manufacturers or suppliers.

There was a shortage of materials from China. Also, for example, during the pandemic, the price of steel shot up. Raw materials were in very short supply. The logical solution was to wait for things to improve since so much was outside our control.

**Q: What would you most like our readers to understand about Saudi Private Aviation?**

**Dr F:** I would want to assure them that travelling with us, or through us or chartering through us, would result in them having seamless, trouble-free entry into the Kingdom.

We pride ourselves on providing a very pleasant entry into Saudi Arabia. We have had any number of clients in recent years coming to us at the last moment because they could not get ready entry into the Kingdom. We provide everything, from A to Z. As a Saudi government-owned entity we are thoroughly versed in all the ins and outs of what is required and can provide a door-to-door service. You can leave all the headaches to us and fly with comfort to Saudi Arabia. |BAM

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# REALISING DREAMS

Natalie Rodríguez, Principal and VVIP Aircraft Interior Designer at Natalie Rodríguez Luxury Design, talks about her ambitions and the challenges involved in creating great aircraft interiors



Image: B787-8 Haven V VIP ©Natalie Rodríguez Luxury Design

**Q**: Natalie, how did you get involved in aircraft interior design?

**NR:** I've known that I wanted to design aircraft interiors since I was 16. At the time, I was talking to a high school friend about what I wanted to do after school. I'd grown up with the performing arts and with the visual arts and wanted to be an interior designer.

My friend said, "Oh, that sounds great. My aunt does that, only she designs aircraft interiors." That really sparked my interest and I decided that I wanted to do exactly that. I started to do intern work at Gore Design Completions, and they kept me on as a staff designer while I was still in school.

I thought when I joined that I would be doing designs for light-long range business jets. In fact, what they had me working on was wide-body and narrow-body ACJs and BBJs. I did not know when I joined that there even were airliner conversions into private business jets.

For me, that was like an amazing playground. You have so much space in narrow and wide-body jets. Of course, it is still inside a tube, but you have so much freedom with the way you plan and layout that space.

I had just turned 22 when my tenure at Gore finished. So much has happened since then and I am still a little way from my 30th birthday! In September 2015, I had a break from



“Completion centres have helped me to be where I am today, and laid the groundwork for me to go independent and to launch my own aircraft interior design practice.”



Images: B787-8 Haven V VIP ©Natalie Rodríguez Luxury Design

aircraft design and went off to do residential and commercial office design, but my heart remained in aviation.

Then, I found that AERIA Luxury Interiors had an opening for a designer. I spent three years with them. Unfortunately, AERIA closed its doors during the pandemic. However, Citadel Completions had an opening for a designer and I spent two years with them. They were a really great team and I really appreciated the experience that I gained with them.

These completion centres have helped me to be where I am today, and laid the groundwork for me to go independent and to launch my own aircraft interior design practice.

“The overarching idea is to design a space that they are going to fall in love with, and that will enable them to carry out the missions they have for that aircraft.”

**Q:** So, what made you pick San Antonio, Texas, as the location for your studio?

**NR:** I grew up here – I’m really happy to be back in my hometown and I’m excited about what the future holds. There’s also a rich history in VVIP aircraft completions here, which I find to be so special. As I recently opened my doors, I’m still anticipating my first BBJ or ACJ commission as an independent designer, but I have a very exciting pipeline of work already.

Some requests have been from end users of the aircraft, some from completion houses and MRO shops, as well as other design shops that require additional design support and expertise.

**Q:** How would you define your approach to design?

**NR:** My design philosophy is very customer-centric. I am very driven by the idea of producing designs that will really wow the customer. After all, they are the ones who will be flying in the aircraft. Of course, if they are uncertain or unsure of the direction they want to go in, as far as the design is concerned, I am very happy to advise them and to produce ideas that will help them to refine their vision and understanding of what they want for their aircraft. The overarching idea is to design a space that they are going to fall in love with, and that will enable them to carry out the missions they have for that aircraft.



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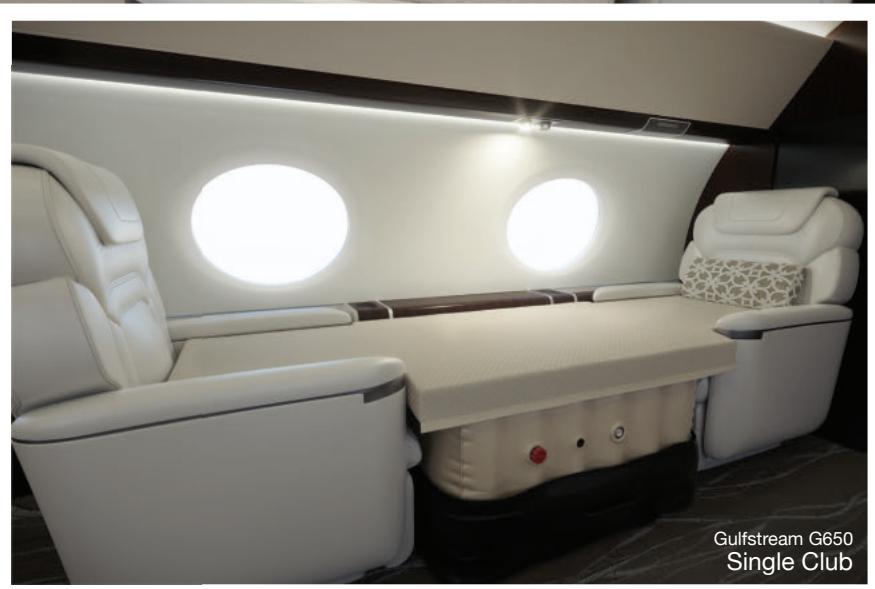
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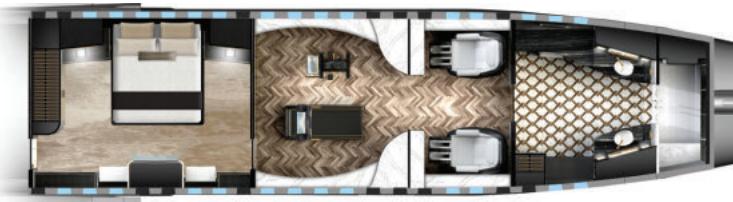
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Images: BBJ MAX 8 V VIP ©Natalie Rodríguez Luxury Design



**Q:** Are you optimistic about the future of the aircraft interior design industry?

**NR:** Absolutely. Business aviation is such a global industry. Now, with the very significant increase in the demand for business jets, there is a surge of interest in renovating and re-outfitting older business jets that people perhaps were not so keen on spending money on a few years back. So, whether it is about re-equipping the whole interior, or ripping it out and re-imagining the complete space, there is a good amount of work out there for designers and design houses.

I'm very happy to have a lot of work in the pipeline, and I am really excited about what the future holds. Right now is a great time to be a part of this industry. When I went independent, I didn't imagine that I would garner a pipeline of projects on this scale, this quickly, within the first four months of launch. I feel so thankful for this next chapter, and I look forward to a series of wonderful projects with my customers. |BAM



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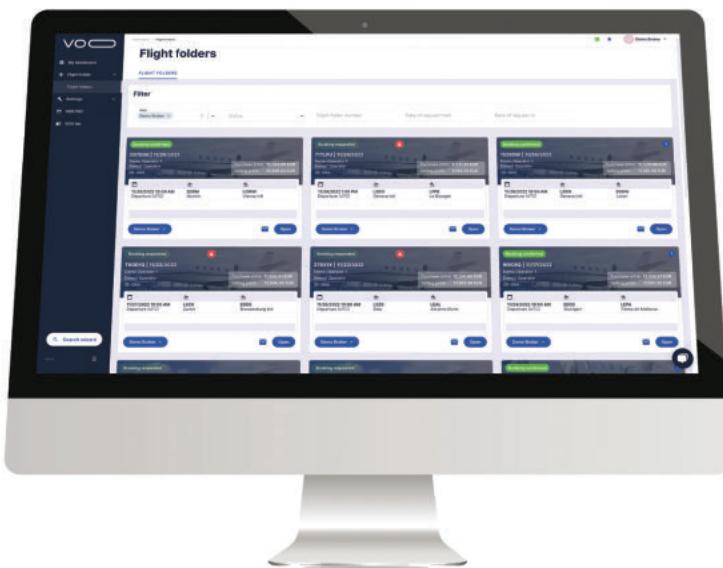
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# SPEED AND COMPLETENESS COUNTS

Robert Plhak, CEO and Partner, VOO flights, talks about the launch of the B2B marketplace for private jet booking, VOO



## INTRODUCTION

The VOO marketplace was developed in Austria and is a 100% Austrian company, founded in 2020 by five partners with the aim of revolutionising the charter business.

### **Q: Robert, what sort of career path were you on before the VOO project?**

**RP:** My career in business aviation started in 2006 when I joined a large Austrian operator, Jet Alliance. I was responsible for charter sales, especially for direct clients. When I joined, the company had been going for a decade. In 2007 I left the company with some colleagues and helped to launch AvconJet.

I supported them in growing from their start-up position to the point where they became another major operator. In 2010, I left AvconJet and set up my own business as a charter broker. At the time, I was passionate about the fact that clients and customers need to be treated better. Equally, it



was clear to me that the way aircraft are marketed for charter and the way owners are treated could be greatly improved.

So, I began my charter broker business, called SKYLINE Aviation, and also provided sales agent services, i.e., exclusively marketing charter aircraft for an aircraft owner or operator. I did this for ten years, from 2010 to 2020. En route, I invented a certain way of dealing with "tricky" aircraft that were older, more complex to charter or with high charter prices.

I had to find a way of calculating a reasonable charter price for these older aircraft that was fair to both the operator and the charter customer. This meant understanding what the real costs associated with that particular type and age of aircraft were, so those costs could be covered and still offer the owner a profit. And all this had to be done in a way that did not make the resulting charter quote too unattractive for potential charter customers. The upshot of this was that I discovered a way of calculating charter prices that was very

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different from the common assumptions that drove charter pricing in the general charter market.

**Q: How did you come to be involved with the development of VOO?**

**RP:** Until 2020, I was selling charter flights on about forty different types of aircraft, for all of which I had worked out what I regarded as the true pricing. However, by that point it had become clear to me that my approach had reached its limit and could not scale any further.

By that time, I began working with four others, including Gernot Winter and René Inkret, who are also the founders and joint CEOs of VOO. We set out to develop a software project that would revolutionise the business aviation market. I closed SKYLINE Aviation so that I could focus fully on this new project.

**Q: Your partners were also involved in a crypto coin project at the time. How does that link in with VOO?**

**RP:** My partners founded a company called AVINOC, which is going very well. It stands for Aviation Network Operation Chain, which is a blockchain and crypto coin company that has its own AVINOC token. The initial coin offering was made in 2017. VOO was founded as their first tokenisation project for business aviation. I joined them in 2019 to help them start the VOO marketplace and design the platform that exists today.

VOO is the world's first B2B marketplace that enables you to directly charter private jets, including searching, booking, paying and managing charter flights. There are a number of other apps

available for booking charter flights, but they are still a long way from offering the complete service that VOO provides.

Take platforms that invite operators to tender for charter opportunities. This is done differently on various platforms, but in each case, the contract closure takes place outside the platform. The problem of how to properly calculate an appropriate charter price inside the platform which both the operator and the broker would find acceptable was never solved. Yet this is the very thing that I have been working on since I launched SKYLINE Aviation in 2010.

Other platforms have a B2C feel to them, where potential passengers are linked directly through to operators. I call those programs "tech brokers". They use software to behave like an instant booking, but in the background, there is always some person taking care of the end client and working with the operator when it comes to receiving the quotes and doing the booking.

Instead, we digitise the entire procedure, including the price calculation. This requires an operator to be properly onboarded into our system so that we have the full history and details on each of their aircraft. This is the information needed to feed our pricing algorithms.

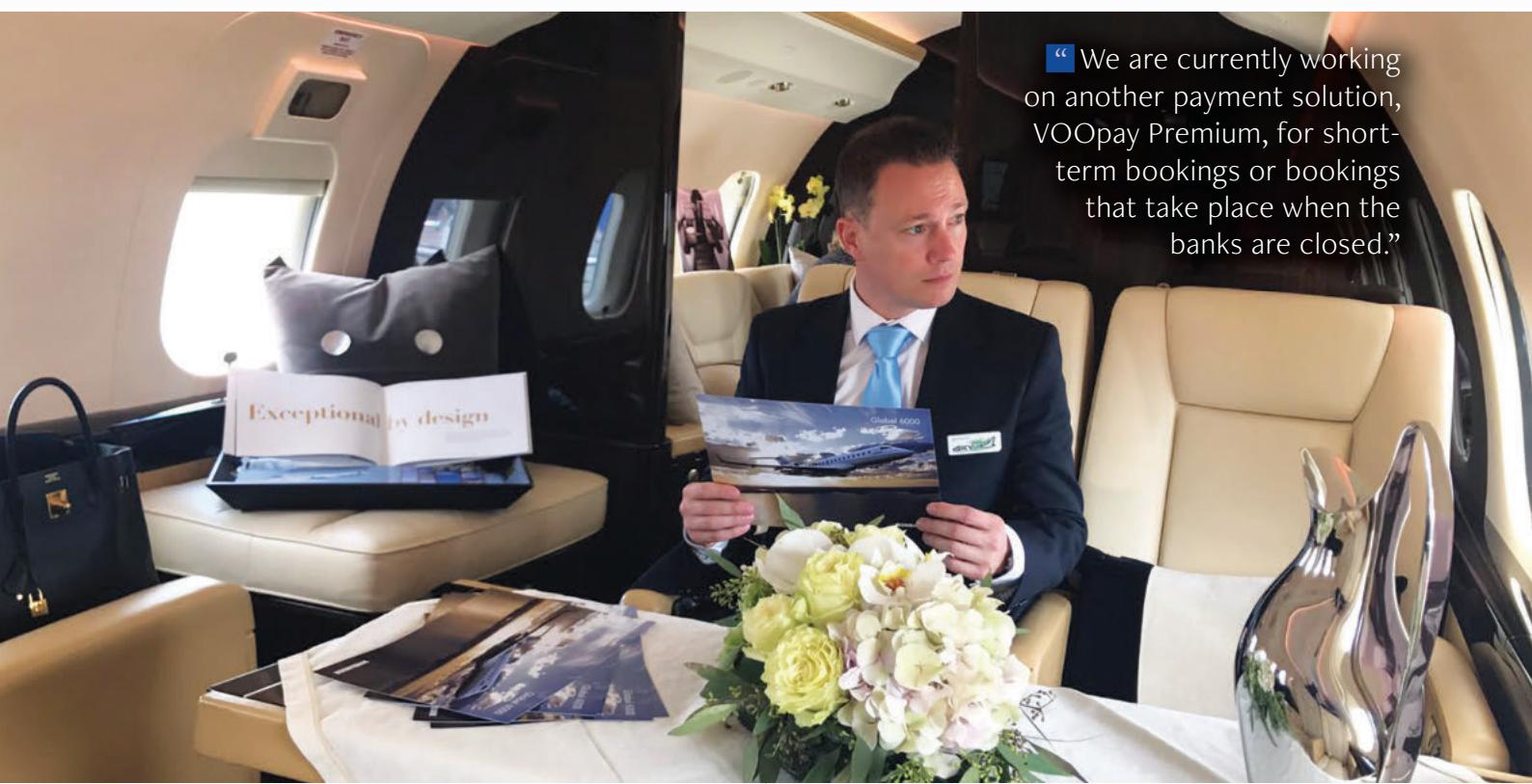
In this respect, VOO is the equivalent of booking an airline ticket on a major commercial airline. You log onto the platform, search for a flight indicating the route, day and time, and number of passengers. Then you receive a return offer with price and availability and book your ticket online directly then and there.



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“ We are currently working on another payment solution, VOOpay Premium, for short-term bookings or bookings that take place when the banks are closed.”

With our system, only aircraft that are guaranteed to be available for the date and route in question are shown, together with the pricing, and the broker chooses the aircraft that matches their client's mission requirements. He or she can confirm the aircraft as soon as the client has made their choice.

#### **Q: How do you handle settlement of the contract?**

**RP:** The broker can pay the operator outside of the system, as they are accustomed to doing right now. Once the flight is booked, the operator sends the broker an invoice. If the broker is onboarded on our solution, we have a tried-and-tested third-party payment provider, and if they have money in their account with the payment provider, they can pay the operator directly.

This can happen even if the operator is not registered with us. The operator will receive a link showing that the money has been transferred to their account from the payment provider. If they are onboarded with VOO, they get the payment immediately directly into their account.

We are currently working on another payment solution, VOOpay Premium, for short-term bookings or bookings that take place when the banks are closed. Under this system, if the broker does not have enough money in their account, and they have been approved by us, we will advance the fee.

This is great for, say, a booking on a Friday night for a Saturday morning departure where the broker does not have enough money in his account to cover the client's fee and

does not have a credit card available for that sum. In this scenario, they will be able to use VOOpay Premium, and we pay the operator immediately if the operator is on our system. If the operator has no account with us, they get a payment link which transfers the money to the operator's account as soon as the banks are open again.

This system will only be available to brokers who have gone through our KYC and KYB processes, and after we have carried out appropriate due diligence on that broker.

You have to remember that AVINOC is a crypto company, and we have crypto tokens out there that are actively traded. So the company has resources which enable us to finance this project. We're not there yet with VOOpay Premium, but we are aiming for the next busy summer season in Europe.

Whenever the broker uses VOOpay or VOOpay Premium, we purchase AVINOC tokens and provide them to the broker and operator for free. So, for every VOO account we have, we give a free-of-charge crypto wallet and we provide tokens as part of our reward programme to customers. For the broker, the tokens act as a discount on the cost of the flight, and for the operator, they provide an additional margin.

This is how we combine the crypto world with charter and broking. You can't actually pay for a flight with cryptocurrencies yet, though we have a project in development which will enable these tokens to be used to book flights. |**BAM**

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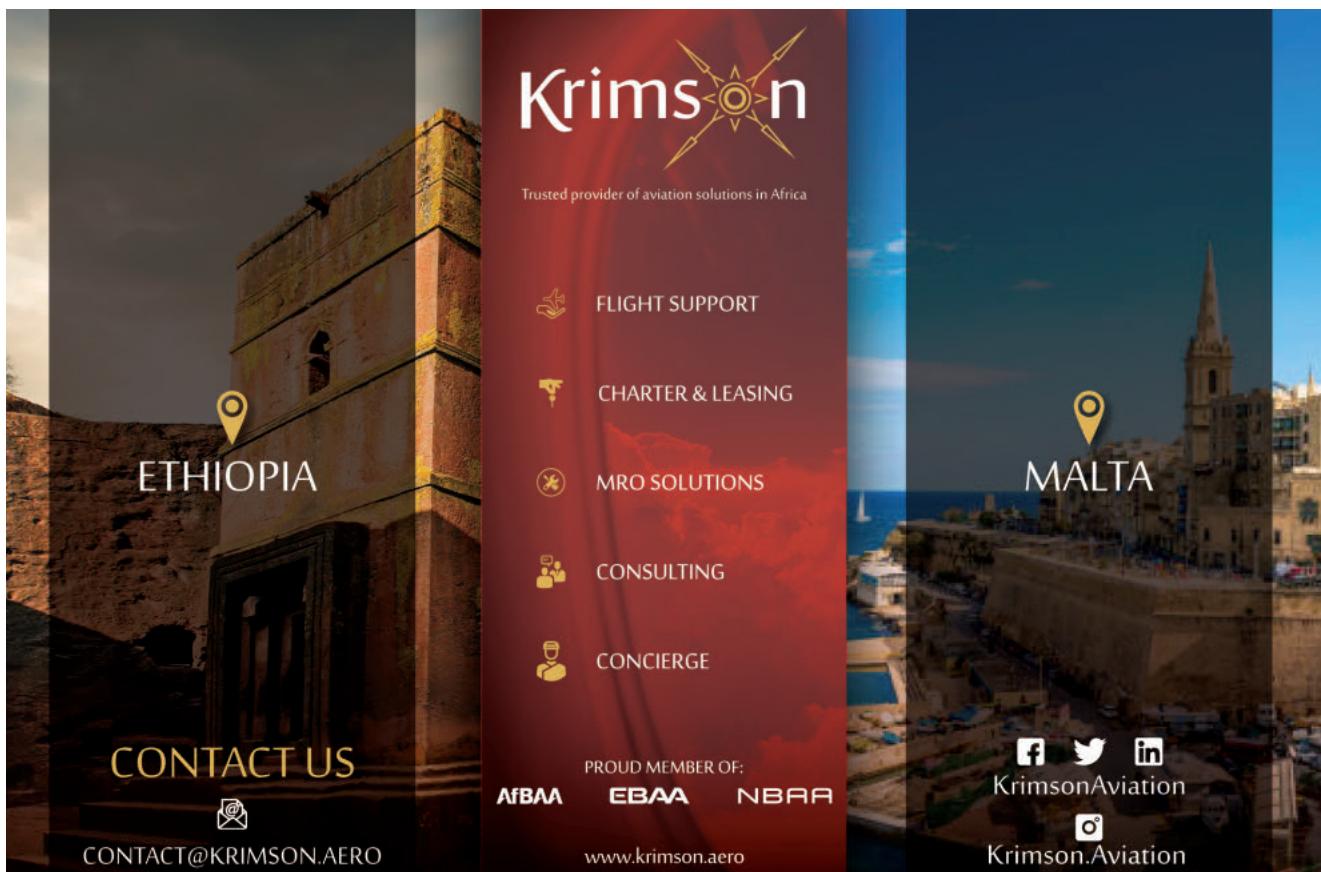
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The banner features a red background with white text and icons. On the left, there's a photo of a traditional Ethiopian building with a location pin and the word "ETHIOPIA". On the right, there's a photo of a coastal town with a church tower and a location pin, with the word "MALTA". The central text reads "Krimson" with a sunburst graphic, "Trusted provider of aviation solutions in Africa", and a list of services: FLIGHT SUPPORT, CHARTER & LEASING, MRO SOLUTIONS, CONSULTING, and CONCIERGE, each with an icon. At the bottom, it says "PROUD MEMBER OF: AfBAA EBAA NBAA" and provides the website "www.krimson.aero". Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram are at the bottom right, along with the handle "KrimsonAviation" and "Krimson.Aviation".



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**A**fter 2 years of blood, sweat and tears, BizAv Media returned to doing something we have loved since the day we opened our doors. October 19th 2022 saw the reintroduction of our much missed business aviation networking events. From across the spectrum of business aviation, industry professionals came together to network and celebrate at the 3NINE club and pool bar within the Rosen Plaza Hotel in Orlando, Florida.

The event was a long time in the planning but well worth the effort. From the packed dance floor to the bubbling atmosphere around the pool bar, our friends, colleagues and partners had a thoroughly joyful night and connected in a lively atmosphere. Friendships were strengthened and new business relationships forged. BizAv Media would like to thank all involved, from the team at the Rosen Plaza that made the night go so smoothly, to our sponsors without whom the night wouldn't have been possible. We extend our gratitude and best wishes to all.









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Jan Kralik CEO



**“**The company has grown from 25 people in 2005 to the point where we are now almost at 300 employees.”

# CONTROLLED GROWTH

Jan Kralik, CEO of ABS Jets, along with the company's FOM, Jan Kotan, and CTO, Vladimir Sip, talk to Anthony Harrington

**AH: Jan, how did ABS Jets get started and what brought you to your present role?**

**Jan Kralik:** ABS Jets was established in 2004 when it took over from a local cargo operator called ABA Air. At that stage, the company had two small Citation Bravos. We added an Embraer Legacy aircraft, then another joined the fleet and more followed. By 2008 we had eight business jets.

At the same time, we started to do maintenance. Initially, this was just line maintenance for our own fleet, then we added an MRO Part 145 Certificate and started doing big C-checks. We added ground handling services in Prague, then in Bratislava, and opened our OCC department. At this stage, we started to support external customers.

So, the company has grown from 25 people in 2005 to the point where we are now almost at 300 employees. This includes 40-something pilots, roughly 80 folks working on maintenance, and others who are technicians, ground handlers and flight planners. In short, it is now a much



Jan Kotan FOM



Vladimir Sip CTO



more complex and demanding operation but is hugely interesting for all of us.

As for my own career, I used to work for a charter airline in a 737 operations department. Then this company, ABS Jets, set up and I applied. They were setting up a brand new business

aviation operation. I did not have a clue at the time about business aviation. I imagined that it was all about flying little Cessna aircraft about the place. They hired me all the same!

I quickly realised that business aviation was a good place to be, not just in this country but in the region. I joined the

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operations department, then led the department as it grew. Now I'm in the hot seat, as the CEO. When I look back on my time in the commercial airline world it is very clear to me that business aviation is much more fun. The problems we encounter every day make it so much more interesting. We are never bored and delivering a top-rate service for clients is very satisfying for all of us.

#### AH: Where does ABS Jets stand relative to other business aviation companies in the region?

**Jan Kralik:** We are the number one company, without question, in Czech Republic and in Slovakia on any of a number of measures. These include metrics like the number of customers, the scale of services provided, employee numbers and turnover. But now, with all the additions to the fleet, and being a Part 145 MRO shop, we are now a very significant company both in the region and in Middle and Eastern Europe.

Within the next 12 months, we will become the number three Gulfstream operator in Europe. I think that is an amazing achievement! This goes hand in hand with the way we are growing our maintenance support, as well as extending our business as an operator.

#### AH: Vladimir, can you fill us in on how things are going on the maintenance side?

**Vladimir Sip:** Back in 2004, as an operator of two small Cessnas and a single Embraer Legacy600, line maintenance

only was performed under our PART145 organization. In 2005 we had just five technicians.

I joined the company as a technician, taking care of the first three aircraft that we had. In 2007 we broadened out and were approved by Embraer as Authorized Service Centre for Legacy. It was followed by approval for Phenoms later on. This began to grow quite quickly. By 2008 we had around 12 technicians. It became clear that we needed to develop our in-house planning and logistics capabilities as well.

Now we are in two hangars, covering over 4,000 square metres; our workshops occupy 1000 square metres with 50 certified technicians. I should also mention that as of this year, we have performed over 570,000 man-hours worth of maintenance on Embraer aircraft, and have done nearly 100 C-checks. We are preparing now for the fifth C-check of our first Legacy600, which shows that we have maintained it to the highest standards for over 20 years now. We also provide mobile AOG support for all our customers and maintenance clients.

Due to the geopolitical situation here we quickly realised that we had to address multiple markets. Today we are looking hard at extending our reach into Western Europe, Africa and even the USA. That requires a lot of effort, and we are putting a good deal of resource into getting our technicians skilled up on new aircraft types, including Dassault, Gulfstream and Bombardier models. Our attention right now is on the Gulfstream 500.

Of course, another big challenge is to maintain all these aircraft types whilst at the same time cutting our carbon emissions and increasing our energy savings. We are planning to invest a lot in our hangars to green them up and to prepare for the energy challenges that are likely in the next year or two.

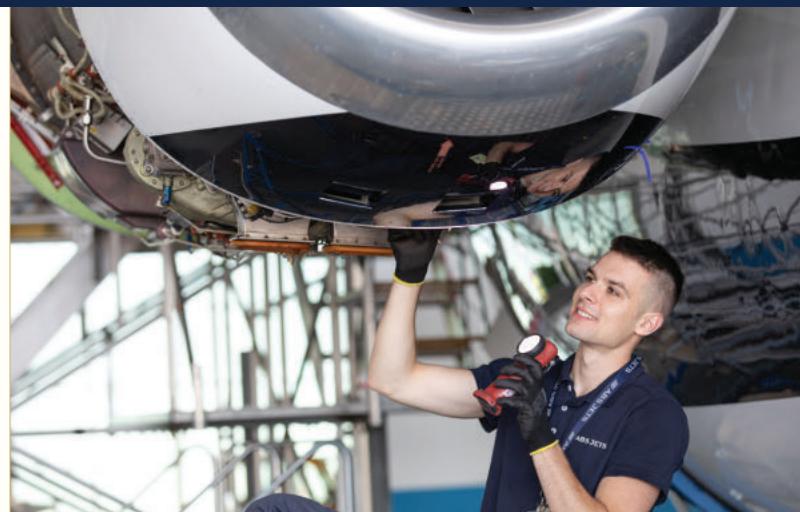
**AH: Do your MRO technicians specialise in just one aircraft OEM or type, or are they multi-skilled?**

**Vladimir Sip:** We go for multi-type certification for each technician. Some of our technicians are type-certified on three different models. We are very proud of the quality of our technicians. Obviously, there is quite a significant cost to have each technician multi-type rated.

**AH: How complex is flight planning and what does it take to get talented staff in this area?**

**Jan Kotan:** Flight planning is a very complex area. It is not just about planning the flight. That is far and away the easiest part of things. Flight support, which is the rest of it, is about fulfilling whatever the pilot or the passengers want or need.

The dispatcher has to get the aircraft safely from A to B; then you need good hotel accommodation for the crew and connecting flights if the principal is travelling onward. You have to arrange for whatever your HNWI passenger

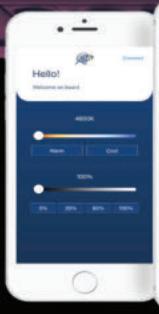


requires. The size of our fleet means that we are arranging these things 24 x 7 all year around.

This was not our vision when we opened our flight department to do our own flight operations arrangements. But then Embraer wanted flight support in our region for the next six years, and we were happy to oblige. That gave us a tremendous opportunity to provide flight support for everything from Lineage 1000 aircraft to Phenoms. Our services became popular amongst the pilot community



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and they began recommending us to other owners, so our customer base grew and grew.

Now we have a good number of pilots around the world who use our services when they are crossing the Pacific or Atlantic Oceans. We now have about 70 crew members in the company. We all know each other very well. That is a huge help and a major requirement as I look, as the head of the flight department, to match people's personalities to the teams they are in.

Fortunately for us, our people are very dependable, very loyal and hugely effective. So it is very easy to manage the department. We dispatch very complex missions on a very regular basis. Last month alone, for example, we did some 50 missions all around the world. Everything went flawlessly and that was thanks to great planning and preparation.

We have a great bunch of professionals to work with. The pilots work face-to-face with the dispatch office, planning what they need, which airports they will be using and so on. This is a great environment for pilots and the dispatchers are very knowledgeable about our procedures, so it is a very time-efficient service for us in our operations capacity.

**AH: How much of what you do as far as the flight department is concerned, is internal, versus supporting third-party clients?**

**Jan Kotan:** Perhaps 30 percent of what we do is internal to ABS Jets, the rest is all third-party. Aircraft management is also a key part of our business. We have six Gulfstreams, four Embraer Legacy jets, three G550s and a Falcon 7x. More recently we added a Challenger 605, and in 2023 we are expecting to add a Gulfstream 700 and another 650. We also have an EC145 helicopter that we manage.

Some of the statistics we gather might be of interest. By the end of 2022, we will have flown close to 5,000 flight hours across 2,500 flight sectors, covering around 10 million kilometres.

**AH: How much room for growth do you think the business aviation market has?**

**Jan Kralik:** I think the business aviation market is booming worldwide, with plenty of room for growth. Europe is still far from being a saturated market. There is massive potential there for it to grow to match the US market. Importantly for us, as the charter market grows, our managed aircraft market grows as well.

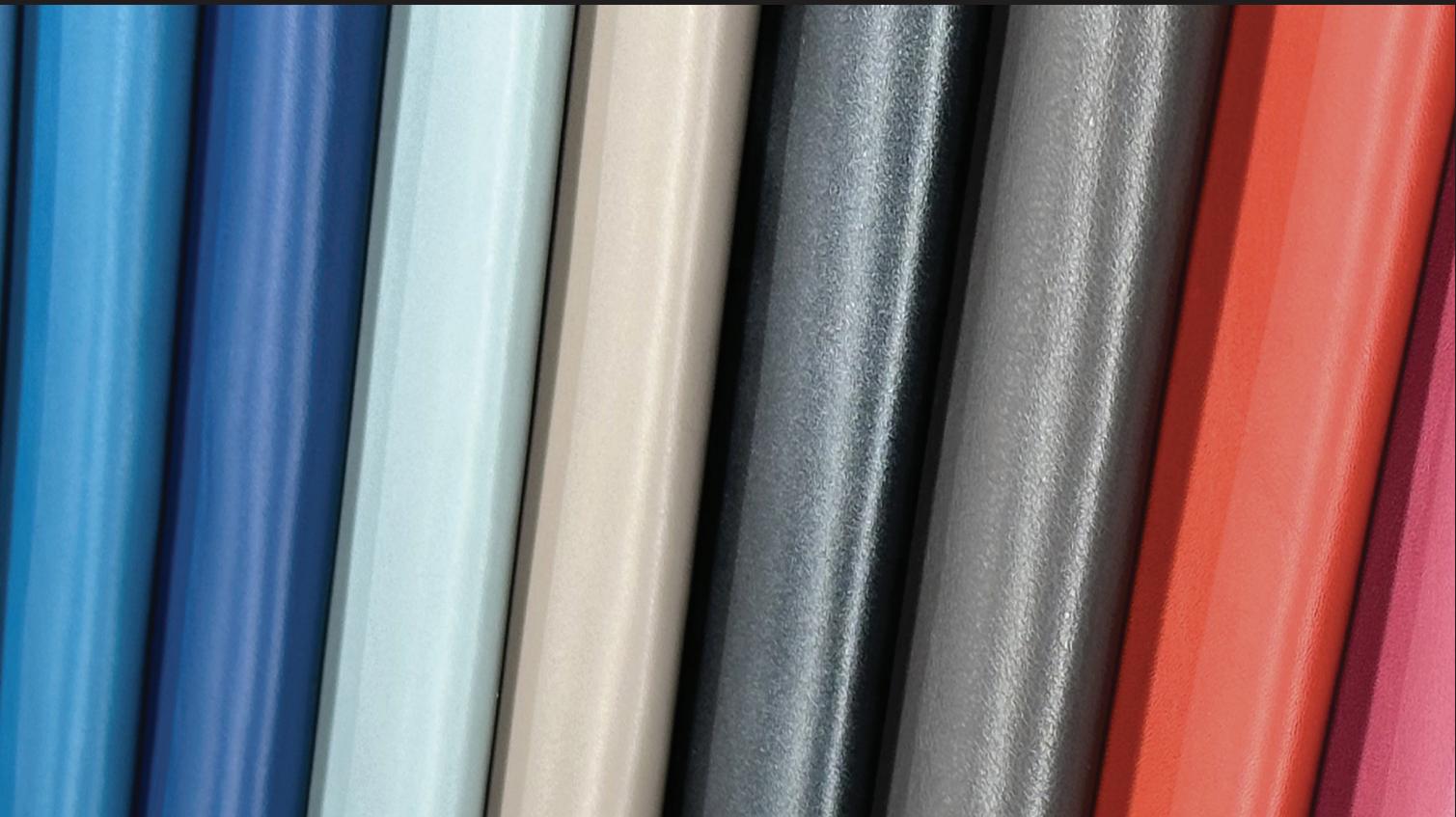
New owners begin by chartering. Then, as they extend their use of charter the number of hours they are flying starts to make acquiring their own aircraft or co-owning the aircraft, an attractive proposition. So there is plenty of potential there.

**AH: The global pandemic, followed by the war in Ukraine, clearly created and continues to create difficulties. How do you see things going?**

**Jan Kralik:** As I said, yes, there are challenges, but business aviation has a bright future. This crisis with war is hard to resolve, but we need to be ready and to be in good shape to continue our growth when this war crisis comes to an end. The key now is to protect the business through this more challenging time.

We are staying innovative. My colleague last year came up with the idea of sponsoring a film about the Czech and British airmen that flew together through World War II. That showed in cinemas in October this year. That war was devastating to Europe, yet we quickly got things going again and got into great shape. Our goal, as ever, is to protect freedom and truth. **|BAM**

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