

## Immaculate Service

An Interview with Wayne J. Rizzi, President and Chief Executive Officer, Air Royale International, Beverly Hills, California



**EDITORS' NOTE** After acquiring a private student pilot license at the age of 16, Wayne Rizzi attended Embry Riddle Aeronautical University (Florida), which he left in 1977 to take a position in reservation sales and special services with New York Air, one of the first low-fare carriers to spring up in the wake of airline deregulation. He subsequently held a succession of positions, mostly in sales and customer service on the charter side of the airline industry, and founded Air Royale International in 1994.



Wayne J. Rizzi

**COMPANY BRIEF** Founded in 1994 and based in Beverly Hills, California – with additional offices in New York and London – Air Royale International is a boutique private-jet air charter company serving Fortune 500 companies, private citizens, diplomats, renowned entertainers, and even celebrity animals. The company utilizes a network of more than 5,500 aircraft, ranging from twin-engine turboprops to world-class corporate jets and commercial airliners, offering global coverage 24 hours a day.

### What makes the company unique in the marketplace?

I'd like to use an analogy to answer that question. Most people are familiar with the coffee-house chain Starbucks. I think everyone would agree that they have created a global standard, and they do a great job. You know exactly what to expect when you go to a Starbucks store, no matter where you are in the world. But if you had a choice, where would you prefer to go for coffee? Perhaps you would choose that neat little corner café, where the servers greet you because they really know you, and prepare your coffee just how you like it as soon as they see you walk in the door.

We emulate the latter model, with our three offices in Beverly Hills, New York, and London. Our clients want a more intimate relationship than they can get with our larger competitors. Because we are a boutique company, we are able to adapt to

the needs of our clientele at a rapid pace, giving us a distinct advantage over larger companies. For instance, a client can call and talk to me personally, if I'm not traveling. What are the chances you could speak with the president of Starbucks? The owner of that little café is probably going to be in the back, making sure that the finest coffee and all the ingredients for his great pastries are there. So that's what makes us unique.

There's nothing wrong with Starbucks, but, boy, wouldn't you like to shake hands with the president?

### What are your plans to build brand awareness?

I take an unusual approach to building brand awareness, because in our case, I believe it's best to rely on word-of-mouth marketing. I just want my clients to talk about the company. I don't want Air Royale to be a household name, and I don't foresee putting the name up on any billboards. And as for placing ads, we advertise in only one publication and it's not even available on newsstands. We have discovered that the people who need to know our brand do know our brand, and word spreads. I recently got back from London, and while I was there, I found out that a lot of senior executives had heard about our brand from fellow leaders.

### Are you only interested in reaching the top tier of the market?

Not entirely. We recently expanded our focus to reach what you might call the second tier of the market. Since the unfortunate events of 9/11, an increasing number of companies have established their own flight departments. So we also go after the business owner who has up to 100 employees and is beginning to understand how convenient private-jet charter can be.

We have also expanded into the leisure-travel market, and that development has been quite amazing. Air Royale now has a sister company called Private Jetaway by Air Royale, which we designed for a particular type of client. We not only transport these customers from point A to

point B, but we can secure them a villa, a yacht, or whatever it is they want in any social or leisure setting.

### Is most of your business in the U.S. market, or are you equally focused on international opportunities?

The majority of our business is still within the United States. That's where the company was born and where we have traditionally focused our business. That said, we are experiencing very strong growth overseas. We opened our London office last year, and there is tremendous potential there. We are also keeping an eye on the Asian market and on China, in particular.

### When choosing private-jet charter services, people often focus on two key areas: safety and service. What is your approach to those aspects of the business?

We have a reputation for excellent service, and our clients also know that, for us, safety will always come first. We advise our clients continually that safety is paramount in our corporation. In fact, Air Royale is one of a select few global companies recommended by Wyvern Consulting LTD, the gold standard of aviation safety auditing. As for our client service, our team members share one essential trait: commitment to excellence. They have made their passions their career, and it shows not only in their spirit, but also in their exceptional work.

### When you founded Air Royale 11 years ago, what made you think there was a need for this type of company?

At that time, there were a lot of big companies doing what we do, and I noticed that they were unable to make the necessary commitment to service. Incidentally, I still think they fail to make that commitment. Eleven years ago, whenever I called to procure a jet aircraft on behalf of my boss, I was horrified by the poor service. These were \$30 million aircraft I was calling about, and it was as if I was buying cookie dough in bulk. So I saw a gap in the market for a company that could offer an immaculate service experience. My aim was to take service to a new level, and we have accomplished that. ●

*The luxurious interior of the Gulfstream V*