

American private aircraft sector beefs up security

The private aircraft industry in the U.S. and Canada is responding positively to rising charter and corporate passenger demand for top-level security. Measures to increase safeguards for clients aboard charter aircraft and at FBOs are being given high priority.

They reflect a growing consensus in the U.S. that continually increasing demand for private aircraft services is being driven by a desire for tighter security as well as individual service. And FBOs and charter operators want to live up to, and preserve, the perception that the private aircraft is a mode of transport that provides comfort, security and convenience.

Haylee Hall of Nashville Jet Charters confirms: "Yes, our business at Nashville Jet has increased substantially due to the increased security concerns. Immediately after 9/11, we saw a quick jump in charter sales, then a temporary slowdown due to peoples' overall desire to stay at home and not travel.

"Not long thereafter, people realised that they still needed to travel and to continue to do so efficiently. Charter was a much more viable option."

She estimates business has increased by about 20 per cent with the majority of that increase coming from business travel.

Landmark Aviation has invested heavily in security at its flagship Toronto FBO, reflecting a tightening of security at all its bases. Last year it entered into a long-term lease agreement with the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) to redevelop an existing 100,000 sq. ft. hangar in the North Business Aviation Area of the Toronto Pearson International Airport.

In addition to the newly renovated hangar that will accommodate additional aircraft, Landmark's FBO now offers a new camera surveillance system.

"The facility provides the highest level of security for our customers," president Shawn Vick says.

Kaiser Air, based at OAK in San Francisco, reports that security alerts continue to have a strong



Universal Weather and Aviation has launched an improved country brief that provides up-to-the-minute, country specific security intelligence for dispatchers, pilots, crews and passengers. The information is presented in the form of a risk assessment rating or ranking.

effect on demand for private aircraft charter and facilities. Andy Fitzgerald, vp aircraft acquisitions, sales and maintenance of the Chevron dealer, says: "The level of enquiries, and subsequent business, increases each time there is an alert. Requests for quotations for aircraft operations and purchase are up."

The activity of managed aircraft had also increased. But, while charter is up, scheduled flights are suffering, with both service and safety bringing negative reactions.

Five years on from 9/11, OAG, a global travel and transport information company that collates data from more than 1,000 scheduled airlines on a daily basis, identifies a numbers problem.

"The volume of flights worldwide in September 2006 was six per cent higher than five years ago, with 136,000 more flights operating, yet the U.S. domestic market is still

behind pre-9/11 levels with 71,000 fewer flights," it says.

And the heightened security in the U.S. has had an effect on operators from abroad. Jet Netherlands tends to avoid U.S. jurisdiction wherever possible including the parts of the Caribbean that come under U.S. jurisdiction.

Willem de Kruijff, ceo of Jet Netherlands, says: "Business prospects in the region are very positive, in spite of the fact that we are increasingly hampered by U.S. regulations and requirements.

"Loss of valuable time and sometimes harassment of passengers by U.S. immigration have a negative effect on both our product as well as on our passengers' perception of the U.S. If possible, in the interest of our passengers, we now avoid U.S. airspace if we have transit flights. We also see that sometimes executives prefer private jets only because of

the time savings compared to the regular airline product."

The growing popularity of private flights, and the downturn in scheduled alternatives, led Trump Magazine's summer 2006 edition to run a comparison of three commercial carriers that provide transatlantic flights with Air Royale International's charter services.

Commercial carriers, Eos' premium class, Virgin Atlantic's upper class, British Airways' Club World and Air Royale, with base operations in both Los Angeles and London, were surveyed on the basis of providing excellence in service to business executive travellers. Air Royale was ranked first.

Trump's survey measured seven elements of service as its benchmark: express check-in; unlimited carry on luggage; each person's personal space; sleeping accommodation; laptop power outlet at seat

locations; in-flight gourmet services; and whether passengers would have a cashmere blanket and choice of pillow.

Air Royale president and ceo Wayne Rizzi points out: "On a private jet, someone's personal space isn't defined by one commercial seat assignment. For instance, you can charter a private Boeing Business Jet through Air Royale and freely utilise the entire cabin space. When it's time to sleep you can do so in a queen bed, a private space away from the main cabin area."

Rizzi adds: "If Trump Magazine were to compare commercial trans-Atlantic flight services today, categories of 'unlimited carry on luggage' and 'express check-in' would be omitted. The 10 August foiled terror plot, plus new airline threats recently published in the media, is driving more business travellers to use on-demand air charter."

Air Royale, with additional offices in New York and Hong Kong, has had to add additional staff, as more airline travellers are flying on private jets.

"Numerous business travellers have opted to avoid long security lines, extra screening at the gate and the good chance of losing their luggage at commercial airports," he says.

"Companies that have called our offices are telling us that private, on-demand air charter is rapidly becoming a priority, especially when they can pay as they go, versus up front payments for jet card or membership programmes. As the airlines have cut service in regional areas, too, that's also driving more business travellers to private air charter."

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is encouraging airport managers, flight schools, flight training providers and aircraft operators to remain vigilant after a report of an incident involving suspicious activity at a flight school.

Among recommendations from TSA to the general aviation industry is the use of auxiliary locks for aircraft.

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