

# THE JOURNEY OF A CUSTOMER

The process of making a difference



I have been asked on occasion to visit aviation operations and provider companies as a way of showcasing their capabilities to people like me as well as expanding their client base. Last year I

reported about a great visit I made to NetJets. These types of visits serve both of us, as it helps build the company's business and my resource base. These are win-win days. I made a similar visit last month to Duncan Aviation, in

Here are some tips. First, like any other vendor search you must define your needs. This is not hard but should be done prior to the time you are under the gun. Develop a resource list that includes providers who can cover the full spectrum of your department's needs. Do not put on blinders in this critical first stage. In fact, open this discussion up to include pilot needs, maintenance needs, avionics needs, even catering and hangar maintenance needs. Use this part of the process to build a broad list of potential providers.

Next draw on your friends and fellow aviation professionals to review this list and utilize their knowledge of the listed providers. Ask them for feedback based on their customer experiences of the facilities they know. This process will

be invaluable.

Now then, how can you make the companies you decide to work with go from "Good to Great?" It has to be a joint effort between the provider and its customers.

This was the initiative that Duncan was after. Duncan wanted to take itself from a position of highly respected, solid deliverables and go further. Duncan wanted to create a dialogue that allowed for honest input from a group of customers that would provide a set of building blocks with which to excel on.

Believe me it was not a day where we went around the room passing compliments to the management team assigned to lead this session. In the eyes of the participants it was honest feedback about moving from Good to Great. It was

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Lincoln, Nebraska. Of course I have been to the facility many times as a customer.

This visit had a slightly different twist. It was based on asking a group of about 12 people to be a part of what Duncan was calling a "Customer Advisory Board". This group of customers, mostly maintenance directors of large and small flight departments gathered to be listeners as well as contributors to a journey of making a difference. That sounds kind of ethereal, but it really was not some vague word crafting, designed to feel fluffy and soft; it was a real effort by a major maintenance and modification company to strive further by understanding the needs of its customers.

This article is not as much about Duncan Aviation as it is about finding companies today that are customer-focused. With so many flight departments having such real pressures to fly existing equipment more hours per year while being tasked to keep costs down and reliability up, these type of customer-focused companies are a must for the future of our industry. How do you find one? How do you contribute to that company's culture? It is not easy to find needles in haystacks!

help begin to cull the list down.

The paired down list can then be more easily worked with the following pointers. Assign someone from each sector internally in your department to begin making calls to the listed companies. Interview them based on a list of common questions that have been developed that helps determine their true ability to serve your department in time of need. After all you will probably never go to a maintenance facility and just say "take all the time you need and don't worry about a quote up front!" You will always be pressed for time and always demand accountability to the job against a bid and of course expect top quality work.

Therefore, develop questions that speak to your department's specific needs and historical demands. Be sure to get a list of at least three references (of people) that they serve with similar operations. Make the calls and find out how the provider has delivered the promised service. Has it been on time, on budget and as represented?

In a time where every minute counts, a preferred provider list built on a solid foundation based on either direct experiences or those experiences of people who you know and trust will prove

an opportunity for a select customer base to provide direct input to help a provider move even closer to the customer's needs.

The day ended with several productive and positive steps that not only the provider could take but also, even more importantly, some great steps that both provider and customer could take together to build more solid, hassle free processes.

This is a great model for more forward thinking, customer-focused providers to undertake and build strong relationships and lasting customer alliances. I commend Duncan and all of its management for undertaking such a positive step to move from Good to Great. I am proud to have been asked to participate.

All of you reading this will benefit from these types of gatherings. I suggest that each of you proactively work with those providers that are important to you and help them help you by keeping them fully apprised of your needs and their ability to meet them.

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