

Traveling To See Our Clients: Redefining Our Universe

When I first started in this business 34 years ago, I was a Piper dealer in Houston, Texas. I had a defined sales territory and traveling to visit a prospect or client meant getting in my car and driving across town. In fact, the other side of town was usually my longest trip. I was home every night for dinner and overnights were dedicated to annual sales meetings or vacations.

As time went on I started brokering turbine aircraft and I branched out to the edges of Texas - still relatively short trips. Over the years, however, my business has grown and my travels take me all over the United States, and now increasingly all over the world.

In the past, an occasional call from a prospect in Europe or South America mostly went unnoticed by me, since, to me, completing a deal out of our country's borders was difficult, required added expense, and had an unpredictable outcome. These random opportunities for International business were seldom acted upon by most of us in the business just a handful of years ago. This is all changing, and changing at lightning speed.

In the last three years as much as 60% of the manufacturer's backlog, which in some cases is now as long as three to four years, is made up of International orders. So what is the bottom line? Our clients and prospects are not just across town any longer. When the phone rings in our office and a caller identifies themselves as being located in the Middle East or Eastern Europe, our ears perk up and we embrace with absolute confidence the caller's request for information. The days of not focusing on, or even being so arrogant as to believe that we did not need business from, outside of our country's borders is over. Our trade area is changing, expanding by leaps and bounds.

So get ready. It's time to buy bigger suitcases! The overnight suitcase will not be enough to get you to the prospects or clients. This year our staff will be traveling to China to attend and speak at the ABACE show. Following that show will be the Singapore Airshow - a combination of Military, Commercial and Business Aircraft. From Singapore the focus will shift to EBACE,

which happens in Geneva in May. From Geneva our efforts will change focus to Russia in September. And of course, we will all be back in Orlando in October for our annual NBAA Convention. Finally, we'll be attending the Dubai Airshow in November.

These events I mention are the larger shows and forums, but there are also a myriad of smaller International and regional shows to attend. These new selling opportunities worldwide are in addition to all of the wonderful opportunities that are ever increasing in our country. It is really about 'This *and* That', not 'This *or* That'! In no way is this article, or the writing about all of the new frontiers, about abandoning our own backyard. This is about the expansion of our Universe.

The business we have all built and worked for years is still alive and well. It has just expanded to include the world! Internationally, not only are there shows, but also a very exciting maturation of aviation associations to support this worldwide growth in Business Aviation. Our own country's trade association, the NBAA, is being used as a model by other countries, contributing to these emerging worldwide associations.

These new associations are starting to support the safety and education of the operators in these new markets. Wonderful people are coming together to start and support this growth. As a Board Member of NBAA and Vice Chairman of the AMAC committee, I have been most privileged to get to know the leaders of these associations and hear first hand the goals and aspirations of their respective members and organizations. Let me take a moment to make you aware of a few: MEBAA, the Middle East Business Aviation Association based in Dubai, EBAA, the European Business Aviation Association based in Belgium, CBAA, the Canadian Business Aviation Association based in Ottawa, Canada, and IBAC, the International Business Aviation Council, Ltd. based in Montreal, Canada. These are just a few of the growing number of wonderful Business Aviation trade associations cropping up worldwide.

So now you can begin to see the growth,

the depth and the infrastructure that is being created to accommodate the explosion of Business Aviation globally. It is so exciting to us and we are challenged daily to embrace and encourage this growth both

internally and externally to our company. My son Josh and I are working daily to build relationships that will strengthen the position of our clients in the United States as they work to buy and sell their respective aircraft into and out of what was the universe of the near past.

There is no way I could be as bold as to say I was a pioneer and discovered this new world. But it would not be too bold to say that I am creating a new reality for myself. The new frontiers that I have mentioned in this article come with great people who are, like us, dedicated to doing business the right way and keeping our clients' needs in the forefront. It would not be too bold of me to say that as my reality changes, so do the boundaries of my business world.

Lastly, it is not too bold of me to say that you CAN teach an old dog new tricks!

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