

A Trickle Down Effect Of A Fast Moving Market

For the last several years we have all been reporting on - and feeling the effects of - a marketplace that seems to be bursting at the seams. Rising prices, supply of like new, low time aircraft almost non-existent, and a two to three year backlog from the manufacturers - all of these are by-products of this crazy marketplace that we are in. Those of us that make our livings in this market have been busier than ever. We're making more sales and enjoying greater growth than ever in our collective pasts. All seems great, or is it?

This article will take a look at the dark side of this expansion: The side that is creating the real headaches. Maybe I should just take a pregnant pause and let you each fill in your own conclusion about the topic I am about to address. This explosion is probably creating other problems I am not addressing here.

My beef is with the very unprofessional manner in which the maintenance facilities are dealing with this workload. That seems like a harsh statement, but if you have scheduled an aircraft for a regular shop visit or a pre-buy inspection lately, you have all experienced this reality. In fact, I even had one factory-owned facility admit that they were running at 183% of capacity! They had the nerve to admit this to me on the day I showed up with an aircraft that had been scheduled for a pre-buy. We had been on their schedule for over five weeks! It's not as if it was a surprise drop-in or last minute scheduling with arm twisting. We had given them over five weeks' notice. When we arrived, they told us that they would park us on the ramp and hoped to get started within a week from the day we arrived.

Maybe the shops don't understand what that means to everyone involved. The seller of the aircraft stopped using his aircraft one week earlier than he would have needed to, and consequently they also had a week of charters to pay for that they could have avoided, not to mention the delay of closing for an additional week at a minimum. The buyers paid for the pre-buy a week early

and that is not a small sum. Both sides sent maintenance personnel there and had to decide to fly them all home or leave them. Either way an added cost.

If this was an isolated incident, I would never dedicate an entire article to it, but this happens almost every single time. We have been involved with almost 40 pre-buys this year and not a single one has started on time. Not all are a week late, but they are all days late. If the delayed start time were all that we had experienced this year, maybe I would be frustrated but not to the point of writing an article. This is, however, only the beginning.

“What can we all do to make this period of our professional lives better?”

The ability for these shops to keep manpower on the aircraft in a dedicated fashion is also problematic. It seems they have look-outs posted in the parking lots. As soon as we leave they take manpower off of the plane and shift it to the squeakier wheel. We have made surprise shop visits on more than one occasion and they have had our plane pushed in the corner with no one working on it. This is no way to run a business. I have heard all of the comebacks: 'Good help is hard to find', 'can't find enough qualified help these days', etc, etc, etc. I appreciate the need to recruit people at all skill sets to the general aviation industry, and I am a supporter of several aviation career days throughout the country. I believe in our industry and its ability to attract good people. I do not believe, however, in maintenance sales personnel scheduling shop visits when they know that there is no room.

They are getting to be like the airlines, overbooking then hoping some people cancel, or the hotel front desk we have all walked up to with a paid confirmation only to find out that, "sorry, there are no rooms".

This phenomenon is not about a 10% over-book, this is about a percentage of over-scheduling that is unacceptable. This is a problem that will hurt us all. The next concern is that now we'll all be wondering what kind of job they are doing when they finally do get around to working on our planes.

Well, there is the problem, what is the solution? What can really be done to change this overbooking to a tolerable level? None of us really want to hear that the shops we want to go to cannot accommodate us. So are we as much a part of the problem as they are? Probably. What can we all do to make this period of our professional lives better?

The answer is not for us to tolerate the current over-booking. I guess the answer is for us all to reset our expectations about the time it will take to get a pre-buy completed and the corresponding corrective action. The 10-day experience is over. The 30- to 60-day experience may just become the norm. The "yes we can take you, come on in" answer needs to be used much more sparingly by the salespeople at the facilities. The debriefs that take place at the beginning of each visit need to be attended by all leads that will participate in the visit.

Honest assessments of the work scope and timing need to be articulated and focus on delivering what is promised is an absolute must. The shop visit cannot be a moving target that creates a dizziness to all involved. This time of making hay while the sun shines should not be the downfall for us all.

› Jay Mesinger is the CEO of J. Mesinger Corporate Jet Sales, Inc. He is on the NBAA Board of Directors and is Vice Chairman of AMAC. Additionally, he is on the Duncan Aviation Customer Advisory Board. He also hosts the Aviation Leadership Roundtable found at www.jetsales.com ■

