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AIR TRAVEL — YOUR WAY

Alternatives to commercial flight have some distinct advantages

By Lisa Maddux

David Smith admits he used to be among those who considered private aviation an option only for the business elite.

"I figured it was just way too expensive," said Smith, a principal and Madison branch manager of **KJWW Engineering**. But after inquiring about private charter flights a year ago, KJWW has used the option more than six times.

"You basically show up, you throw your stuff on the plane," Smith said. "It's just a better way to go."

KJWW provides consulting engineering services for building and infrastructure systems, and has seven offices worldwide, including one in Madison. For a current project involving the design of a new hockey arena in Duluth, Minn., Smith said commercial flight options proved unwieldy and time-consuming. Only one commercial airline makes the trip and tickets are generally upward of \$1,000 apiece. With a private, charter flight through **Wisconsin Aviation**, the fixed base operator at **Dane County Regional Airport**, KJWW associates can choose arrival and departure times and spend more of their own time on the business at hand.

Flexibility an asset

Flexibility, whether it involves scheduling flights or choosing airports, seems to be the biggest asset private aviation offers to business travelers that they won't get from commercial airlines. Major airlines fly into about 550 airports across the country on a schedule that works best for them. Private aviation outfits — ranging from charter operations to private jets used through a card system or one of fractional ownership — have about 4,600 airports from which to choose.

"Flexibility just can't be beaten," said Grant Goetsch, vice president of Wisconsin Aviation, which runs a charter component in addition to being the Madison airport's FBO.

Goetsch said he thinks too few businesses investigate charter service, which really could save them time and money in the long run.

"I believe that air charter operations are one of the best kept secrets out there," he said. Being able to schedule flights that fit your own schedule, in addition



A worker at Wisconsin Aviation refuels a corporate jet at the Dane County Regional Airport.

DON WINKLER — WISCONSIN AVIATION

to flying into smaller airports located where you really need to go are just some of the advantages of charter aviation, Goetsch said.

Wisconsin Aviation, with operations at the Madison, White-water and Juneau airports, has 30 planes on its charter certificate and averages about seven charter flights a day.

As an example, a Wisconsin Aviation charter flight could leave from Dane County Regional Airport at 6:15 a.m. and arrive at **Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport** at 7:53 a.m. After a full day of business, that same charter could be available to leave Minneapolis at 6 p.m. and arrive in Madison by 7:08 p.m. The cost for trip would be about \$2,000 for a Cessna 340 that could seat up to five passengers.

Fractional ownership

Since 1995, **Flexjet** has been offering fractional ownership in business jets. Flexjet, part of **Bombardier Aerospace**, offers 50 hours of flying for the cost of a share (1/16) of a jet.

"This model allows them to access a private fleet," said Bob Knebel, vice president of sales for **Bombardier Flexjet**. A five-year contract includes the initial investment and then annual costs based on the amount flown. Costs vary depending on the type of plane, but clients will pay about \$560,000 for a fraction of a Learjet. Annual costs involved in specific trips range from about \$250,000-400,000 a

year, Knebel said.

Productivity advantage

Business aviation in general offers "a productivity advantage that can't be found any other way," Knebel said. "You travel on your schedule, not on the airline's schedule."

In a time when more employees are mindful of a healthy work/life balance, Knebel said this kind of accessibility can certainly help.

"In a competitive marketplace, you have to be something more than a commodity," he said. Making face-to-face contact without sacrificing a lot of wasted time or energy is one way companies can do that, he said.

Flexjet also has a card that offers businesses 25 hours of flight without a fractional purchase, aimed at those who may want to see what the practice is all about. Clients can buy a card for 25 hours starting at a low of \$107,900 for a Learjet 40 and up to \$217,000 for a Challenger 604 (for cards good for 275 days).

Cal Woinn, senior vice president for marketing and corporate communications with **JetDirect Aviation Inc.**, started in the aviation business in 1972 with **Learjet**. When the **Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport** opened in 1973, Learjet put up a bulletin board that essentially said: Welcome to Dallas, your competitor arrived this morning in a Learjet, signed the contract and is back home with his family.

The message hasn't changed, Woinn said.

JetDirect manages and operates more than 250 turboprop and jet aircraft at more than 60 locations around the country, 200 of which are available for charter, Woinn said. Charter prices range from \$1,200 to \$1,500 an hour for 6- and 7-passenger turbo props with a flying range of up to 1,200 miles to \$7,500-\$8,500 an hour for 10- to 15-person jets with a range of 6,500 miles. Several other options are available, based on range, capacity and rates.

"Most companies in this economy are trying to do more with fewer managers — 'right-sizing' — and when (they) travel to out-of-the-way locations, travel time, even with cell phones and PDAs, is relatively inefficient," Woinn said. "Face-to-face contact becomes even more critical in emotionally charged times like today."

It's a business tool

John McCormick is vice president of sales for the Midwest for **Marquis Jet**. The company started in 2001 and offers 25-hour commitment cards for people to use the NetJets fleet, which is a fractional-ownership operation started in 1986. Prices for a 25-hour card start at \$126,900 and vary based on type of aircraft.

"Flying is a business tool," McCormick said. Those who use that tool more than 300 hours a year are probably best suited to owning a plane. Those who fly between 100 and 300 hours a year might be more interested in fractional ownership while

those who fly less than 100 hours a year would probably work best with charter or a jet card.

McCormick said that with at least 10 hours' notice, Marquis Jet guarantees one of its 700 planes will be available.

About 25 percent of Marquis Jet's clients use the service for business.

Examples of use

A Beloit businessman whose company bought another company in rural Pennsylvania recently purchased a Marquis Jet card, Woinn said. The man needs to take several associates to the Pennsylvania plant at least twice a month. After figuring out that he was losing about 35 man-hours a person by taking commercial flights, the businessman purchased a Marquis Jet card.

Those who use the setup for pleasure do so for the same reasons of flexibility and time savings. Woinn said he helped a couple with a home in Naples, Fla., who used to fly commercial out of Madison, leaving at 7 a.m., connecting in Detroit or O'Hare, flying to Ft. Myers, then driving an hour to Naples.

With a private jet, the couple are able to show up at the airport 15 minutes before departure, get on the plane and land two and a half hours later in Naples. "You arrive in time to have lunch by the ocean," Woinn said. "You tell me which you'd rather do." ■

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