

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Private jet travel to become more accessible, tech-savvy

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*Encore.Jets recently launched direct shuttle service between tourism hotspots. Image courtesy of Encore.Jets*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

With technology continuing to disrupt the travel industry, business aviation professionals expect private jet travel to become more accessible and appealing to younger affluents.

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New research by aviation event Revolution.Aero predicts using technology to streamline the booking process is poised to have a significant impact on customer growth. As booking private jet travel becomes easier it will likely coincide with a dramatic drop in the age of a typical private jet customer within the next five years.

"In the past, potential charter customers had to call or email a broker," said Alasdair Whyte, cofounder of **Revolution.Aero**, London. "They would then come back with a number of options or a quote and this will continue.

"Younger customers do not want this interaction," he said. "They want to be able to get a quote and book without talking to anyone."

Revolution.Aero interviewed 115 business aviation professionals in August 2018 for its report.

Technology and transparency

While the travel industry has worked to appeal to younger travelers, the private jet industry has been slower to adapt.

Currently, the average private jet flyer is over the age of 50, but 59 percent of respondents believe it will fall to between 40 and 50 years old by 2023. Another 11 percent believe the average age will drop even more, to below 40.



*Interior of an XOJet plane. Image credit XOJet*

Two-thirds, 67 percent, of aviation professionals also believe that it will become easier to book individual seats on private jets because of new technology and mobile applications.

"Many people who can afford to use a jet would never call a broker," Mr. Whyte said. "Online portals let them see that they can afford private jets without the embarrassment."

For instance, private jet booking service JetSmarter is expanding its booking capabilities online with a new design for easier use.

Users can now make a profile to easily book flights online and on their mobile devices right on the homepage of JetSmarter's digital hubs. The desktop Web site provides a detailed outline of how to book flights through its service ([see story](#)).

"Booking a business jet is far more complicated than booking a taxi," Mr. Whyte said. "Very few business jets are owned by companies that only operate for charter many are owned by individuals that make them available when they are not using them."

"Many operators try and [manage limitations and restrictions] using Excel or even post-stick notes but it really is too complex," he said.



*JetSmarter's new partnership seeks to improve the unique value of membership. Image credit: JetSmarter*

Another expected benefit is reducing "dead-leg" routes and increasing the number of chartered flights. About one in four private aircraft flying at any one time have no passengers on board and can be chartered out at rates discounted up to 75 percent.

"Because private jets fly from literally thousands more airports than airlines, they often have to reposition or fly empty to the next airport to pick up a passenger," Mr. Whyte said. "New technology using big data can reduce the number of empty flights."

Fifty-one percent of respondents believe improved booking ease and increased transparency will make it easier to find passengers to charter out these private jet dead legs.

"The increased transparency also encourages new users. A small business jet with five people is not much more than flying everyone business class," Mr. Whyte said. "And it offers lots of benefits private terminals, privacy, shorter check-in and so on."

Jetsetting changes

Private jet companies continue to introduce special routes and packages to draw new customers.

This summer, EncoreJets launched what it claims is the first non-stop private plane shuttle service between Mykonos in Greece and Ibiza in Spain. The company expects this will help boost tourism to these destinations, between which commercial direct flights are not available.

Priced at about \$2,500 per seat one way, the company's SummerJet service flies customers between Mykonos and Ibiza in less than three hours ([see story](#)).

Private aviation firm NetJets is working with Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts to launch new packages for greater bespoke travel.

Three new packages are now available for customers to personalize their travel plans in made-to-order style. Anguilla, Orlando and the Bahamas are a few of the destinations guests can visit via private air through NetJets with Four Seasons-style service.

The two brands introduced multi-destination itineraries last year, but they are now offering one-stop trips this year ([see story](#)).

JetSmarter also reported triple-digit growth year-over-year in seat bookings, indicating a strong desire among affluent travelers for disruptive jet services.

The company reports that seat bookings have increased by 116 percent year-over-year. JetSmarter's innovative take on private aviation, allowing customers to rent seats rather than the entire jet, has made it a popular choice among young affluent travelers ([see story](#)).

"In the old days, brokers estimate that it would take more than 30 interactions with a customer before they actually flew checking booking details, confirming, confirming payment, choosing food, etc.," Mr. Whyte said. "The more this can be automated while still keeping the product level high the better for everyone."