



Heads in the Clouds

Smaller Planes, Big Advantages in Business Flying

By **Matt L. Ottinger**

LaBov & Beyond, a Fort Wayne-based marketing communications company, has found its Cessna jet can provide a great deal of convenience and efficiency for both its staff and clients (*Morgan Anderson Photography with permission from National Business Aviation Association*).

When famed investor and businessman Warren Buffett purchased his first jet over 20 years ago for Berkshire Hathaway, it was considered a luxury. But after years of use and seeing the impact it had on his business, he ultimately labeled the plane with the moniker, “The Indispensable.”

Andrea Montgomery, vice president of operations for Montgomery Aviation in Zionsville, relayed that story recently when asked about the business of flying. (And according to *BusinessWeek*, the jet was initially labeled “The Indefensible,” with Buffett sardonically barbing himself for what seemed at first like an ostentatious purchase.)

Montgomery explains that general aviation airports and fixed base operators have grown to become essential tools to help businesspeople travel more efficiently.

“We now have approximately 20 jets based here (at the Indianapolis Executive Airport), owned by local businesses,” Montgomery offers. “They use these jets to expand their customer bases, but – more than that – they allow their customers to come to our state and see what we have to offer.”

She explains that before targeting Whitestown as a site for expansion in 2007, major pharmaceutical distributor Medco Health Solutions was very interested in the location of the nearest corporate airport. Now, the company is building a 452,000-square-foot automated pharmacy slated to create nearly 1,400 new jobs.

Montgomery adds that one key misconception many hold about corporate flying is that it’s mostly top-level executives maneuvering the skies in Gulfstreams; in actuality, she says that comprises only a small percentage of business travel.

“Most business travel is done in mid-sized planes,” she explains. “It also allows them to bring their support teams and not have to waste time standing in lines for two hours. It’s incredibly efficient for businesses, and they can go to meetings during the day and be back in time for their sons’ baseball games that evening.”

Getting economic development off the ground

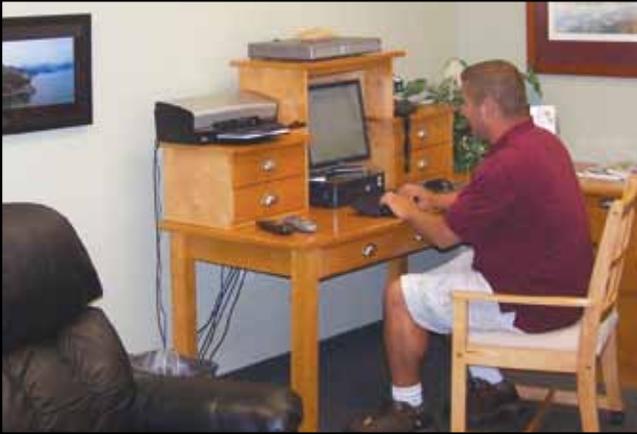
A 2009 study by the Alliance for Aviation Across America concluded that general aviation – not commercial – accounts for 1.2

For businesses contemplating charter flying

How to determine if your operator is legal:

- If the deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Legal operators incur relatively high overhead costs to maintain the aircraft, train and test crew members, and stay compliant with FAA and TSA regulations. Illegal operators are able to offer significantly lower prices, but at much greater risk.
- Ask the operator for their certificate number. A legal operator will be pleased to deal with an educated consumer.
- Call your local Flight Standards District Office and inquire about the operator’s safety and compliance record. You can find this number in your White Pages phone book, in the United States Government listings under the heading, “Federal Aviation Administration.” You can also find information online at www.faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo.

Source: Federal Aviation Administration



Montgomery Aviation in Zionsville not only keeps its business customers happy by featuring an expansive hangar (approximately 20 jets owned by local businesses are based there), but also offers pilots an opportunity to unwind in the lounge. It features comfortable reclining chairs, a television and Internet access among other amenities.

million jobs in the United States and \$150 billion in economic impact annually. It also determined that 85% of businesses that use general aviation are small to mid-sized.

Montgomery asserts that general aviation is a key component in economic development efforts. She cites Warsaw as an example, as the Warsaw Municipal Airport allows some of the largest orthopedic companies in the world to call the Northern Indiana city home.

Image Air Charter LLC is a Warsaw-based company that provides “on demand” private air travel via the Warsaw Municipal Airport. It includes a 25,000-square-foot hangar and 6,000 square feet of office facilities for day-to-day scheduling and dispatching. The company uses two Hawker 800As and two Beechjet 400s, seating eight to nine people in addition to a

two-man crew.

“Our business is growing because – while much business today is conducted through the Internet – most businesses still value communication with their clients in person,” says Glenda Pachniak, general manager.

She believes some of the challenges facing major airlines have benefited charter services.

“The charter business has many benefits over the airlines,” Pachniak adds. “More and more, people are frustrated with long lines, long delays, canceled flights and security issues. On charter flights, you are safe and secure and you decide where and when you want to travel.”

While charter companies are popular, some airports may also consider leasing planes to businesses.

“We don’t, but we are looking into that idea,” says Terre Haute International Airport Director Dennis Wiss. “We think there’s enough local usage, and if someone wanted to do that, they could probably make a go of it.”

Wiss adds that many businesses have found fractional ownership, where more than one company owns a plane, to be a useful strategy.

“A lot of businesses are doing that,” he notes. “If a company can’t justify buying a plane and having it sit, it makes more financial sense if, say, three people own it. That’s a trend that’s definitely increased in the last couple of years.”

Amenities for the business traveler

Many airports now make improvements with business travelers in mind. Montgomery explains that her airport’s new canopy was constructed so passengers wouldn’t have to worry about rain or inclement conditions upon arriving or taking off.

“We’ve also added wireless throughout the building,” she says, “and one company actually used our conference room to conduct job interviews.”

Pachniak contends the greatest amenity charter flights can provide is privacy.

“A businessman might hesitate to open up his laptop or talk with a colleague on a commercial flight, not knowing who he is seated with or next to and what his line of work might be. On a charter flight, you can fly with your own associates and conduct meetings or talk strategy.”



The Indianapolis Executive Airport caters to the needs of general aviation and business clients.

She adds that corporations especially stand to gain from charter services.

"The corporation does not have to own their own planes or manage a flight department," Pachniak asserts. "They can call and charter according to the day-to-day needs of their company without the cost of maintenance, crew, fuel, etc."

Plane ownership, however, is a viable option for some. Barry LaBov, president of LaBov & Beyond – a marketing communications company in Fort Wayne – explains his company has owned a

plane or been chartering flights for over 10 years. The company's first purchase was a Piper turbo prop plane, and it later upgraded to a Cessna six-passenger jet. LaBov was interviewed by the Fox Business Channel in July about business aviation and explained to the reporter, "We have clients all over the nation. This gets us from the 86th largest metro area (Fort Wayne) to anywhere in the United States – direct."

He adds that the company uses the plane 2.5 days per week, flies around 300 hours per year and features two full-time pilots.

"It allows us to expand our business, and it's great for our employees," LaBov details. "We want our employees to have a good home life. Now, our staff members can have an account 600 miles away, they can see their client twice a week, and still have a normal life. Otherwise, they'd be gone for two or three days per week and wouldn't see their families."

He also notes that despite the global economic downturn, his company's flight demand has increased due to new business opportunities.

"We've been getting an increase in new business inquiries from prospective clients," LaBov offers. "So we're flying to Boston, Milwaukee, all over the place. We're currently 20% ahead of last year's pace in usage."

Safety first

When pursuing flights from general aviation airports, businesses are cautioned to beware of the safety ratings of the companies they work with.

"The charter business is very regulated by the (Federal Aviation Administration)," Montgomery says. "If someone wants to charter a jet, they should make sure the company is certified. It's not just, 'Give me \$1,000 and I'll take you somewhere.'"

Image Air Charter echoes that sentiment, noting it is important when using a charter company to know the safety rating and the credentials of the company. That's why it has its own Air Carrier Certificate and was just recently awarded a platinum rating by Aviation Research Group/U.S. Inc., which is the highest possible mark.

'Air' of perception

LaBov explains that when the

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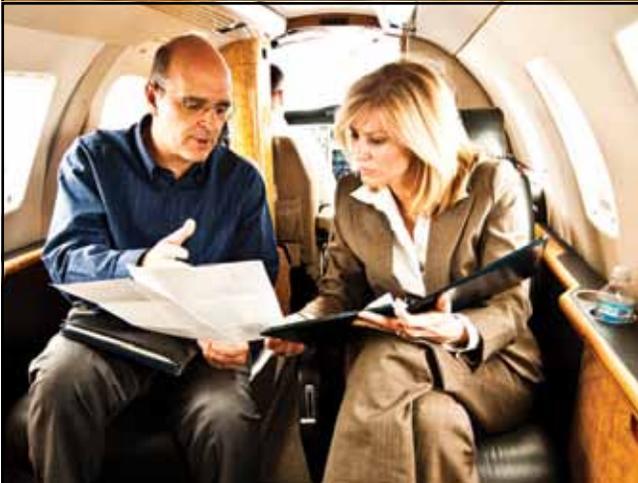
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LaBov & Beyond President Barry LaBov and a co-worker go over meeting details while on the company's plane. Many general aviation passengers tout the privacy that it provides, allowing staff to interact and keep confidential information private (Morgan Anderson Photography with permission from NBAA).

"big three automakers" infamously flew privately to Washington, D.C., for automotive bailout discussions last year, it sullied the reputations of responsible business travelers.

"I think every responsible company has to have flight guidelines to help use the plane in the smartest fashion," he asserts. "It's not a private jet; it's a business jet. We don't use ours for executive perks. In fact, I'm only on about 10% of our company's flights. People at all levels of our business fly on the plane to work with clients. And I think companies that use their jets responsibly have no reason to downplay it."

National Business Aviation Association President Ed Bolen, who participated in the Fox interview with LaBov, also spoke of misconceptions about the practice. He explained to the reporter, "There's been a stereotype that's been promoted that's out of touch with the way business aviation operates in America. Eighty-five percent of companies that use business aviation in the United States are small and mid-sized companies."

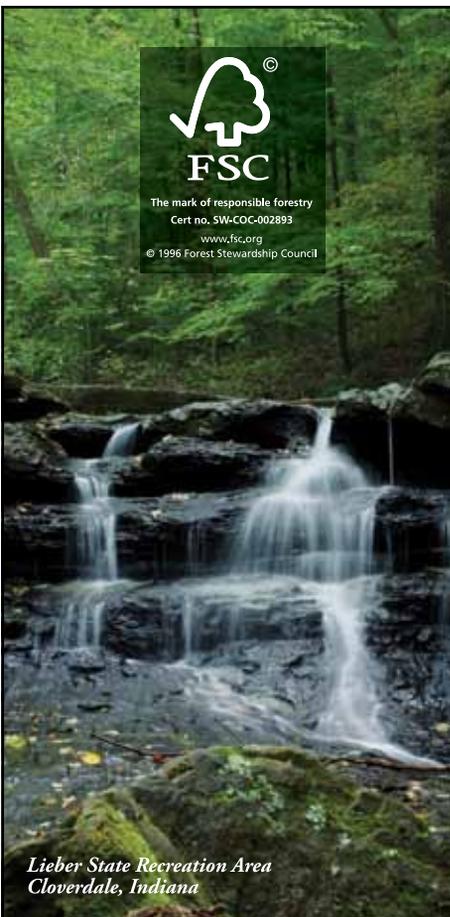
INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Barry LaBov, LaBov & Beyond, at www.labov.com

Andrea Montgomery, Montgomery Aviation, at www.montgomeryaviation.net

Glenda Pachniak, Image Air Charter, at www.iacharter.com

Dennis Wiss, Terre Haute International Airport, at www.huf.com



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