



DC-AVIATION MALTA MANAGING DIRECTOR STANLEY BUGEJA - PANDEMIC, PRESENT AND FUTURE - MACE 2021

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Being a Co-Founder and one of key person organizing an event is a quite challenging. I have to tell that Stanley Bugeja was mostly taking care of others and especially doing the best possible to highlight all companies who took part in recent MACE 2021. Thus, he got less time for being interviewed himself, so we could find out details of pandemic time for DC Aviation Malta. But... we succeeded and here is the essential of our discussion:

Q. Your first reaction finding out what's happening, without even knowing all circumstances of covid crisis?

A. I think like most it was a sense of confusion. In this age of social media it is hard to decipher what is true and what is fake. I sincerely hoped it was much ado about nothing. Unfortunately, we all know how it turned out.

Q. First measures taken by the company?

A. As an aviation company it is very difficult to have all employees work from home, ours is a service that requires hands on deck. However even before authorities starting dishing out regulations, our management decided to have only essential employees in the office and operate on a rotational basis and where possible from home to reduce the points of contact as much as possible. We also installed sanitisers, desk screens and separated the passenger compartment from the drivers of all our executive ramp vehicles. For all our flights we started testing pilots and cabin crew before every flight and sanitising aircraft after every flight.

Q. How you coordinated operations?

A. Unfortunately, at one point there was not much to co-ordinate because we all know what happened, airports in Europe started closing down one by one. Of course, when an where possible we supported governments, companies and individuals with repatriating flights and even handled the business jet that brought the first batch of vaccines to Malta. Once airports started to open up again, we continued to co-ordinate operations pretty much like we always did. DC Aviation is an international group with many locations, so meeting online was the order of the day even pre pandemic. There was no made rush to get video conference equipment and so one. By nature, our business is short notice and worldwide so being connected is the order of the day. Of course, we did more of it but was not an enormous challenge.

Q. Relationship with clients during covid crisis - most important things, most challenging ones?

A. Throughout the crisis we maintained constant contact with our clients, keep them informed with the information at hands, how we are ensuring their safety on their aircraft, through additional safety measures and once available vaccination. The group has an 85% vaccinated workforce. We setup working groups across the group sharing information about the pandemic, do's, don'ts and recommendations as well as shared experiences and operational working groups monitoring the ever changing landscape of restrictions which changed not only from continent to continent but from airport to airport within the same country sometimes. I believe that this proved to be the most challenging task. In aviation we are used to follow instructions issued by the authorities but these follow a certain protocol worldwide to make it easy to understand and leave very little room for misinterpretation, unfortunately, there is no such protocol for the health authorities worldwide and worse still very little to sometimes no co-ordination between the health authorities and the aviation authorities leading to sometimes contradictory information. Whilst revenue business was decreasing the workload was increasing which was an added stress to the industry.



Q. What would you point as main things you've learned during covid period?

A. I do not think that we needed COVID to learn this but COVID has made more evident the need from proper co-ordination across Europe, it is a shame really that we had to endure this lack of co-ordination, and equally painful that as we enter this era of 'New Normal', it seems that little has been learned and European countries within the EU seem to have different sciences, and acting independently of each other put additional strain on business across the continent who are still struggling to recover.

Q. How do you describe the situation in the industry today?

A. Despite all of that, I'm cautiously optimistic on where we are today. For all the years that I have been in the business aviation industry, it has always been a struggle to explain the benefits of business aviation, not because they don't exist but in a very conservative Europe, the industry has always been frowned upon as elitist. One can sense a shift today. As soon as airlines started closing shop, dropping routes left, right and centre, airports queues becoming enormous and moving even within the EU quite the task, people started discovering business aviation. First because they were stuck in a different country and needed to get back home, but as people got tired of lockdowns and started to somehow move again, it was obvious business aviation connects more airports than any airline ever would, the most direct route from an airport closet to your home to where you need to be will almost always be a business jet. You know who you are travelling with, you avoid all crowded airports, you save time and you do it comfortably. So, one can say the pandemic has been the best marketing campaign for the benefits of the business aviation industry. Aircraft sales are soaring, and the charter market is on the up. This is promising if we do move into a real new normal and do not relapse into a state of pandemic chaos.

Q. Short time plans for your company?

A. The short term goals for DC Aviation is the focus on making the organisation greener, through use of SAF, Carbon exchange, participating in the EBAA STARS project and increasing efficiency

overall like the new hangar lightening in the Stuttgart Hangar and replacing with the fleet on the ramp with hybrid and electric vehicles and ramp equipment. We will of course also continue to offer our clients our core activities such as aircraft charter, management, FBO and maintenance.

Q. Your forecast for 2 years to come?

A. Whilst remaining cautiously optimistic for the coming two years a lot rides on the health of the worldwide economy, if we don't leave the pandemic behind us sooner rather than later I see all industries continuing to struggle beyond the next 2 years. The pandemic is hitting where it hurts, that is mobility, if we cannot travel, then we have no business, even if business aviation has proven to be more agile than the airlines and therefore more resilient, we require to be able to fly from one airport to another. That said I believe that before we plateau, for the companies like DC Aviation that provide a discerning service the next 24 months should continue to see a steady growth.



25 NOVEMBER 2021

ARTICLE LINK:

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