SURF AIR SHOPS FOR PLANES TO EXPAND INTO EUROPE

News / Business aviation, Finance

Surf Air, the Santa Monica-based company that charges a monthly fee for all-you-can-fly services, is shopping for planes to expand its business to Europe.

Surf Air executives said they are negotiating with Kansas-based Textron Aviation, which builds Cessna planes, and Brazilian airplane manufacturer Embraer, to purchase a fleet of executive jets for the new venture.

A Brazilian newspaper has reported that Surf Air is in discussion to buy 50 executive jets from Embraer worth about $495 million. Surf Air executives declined to discuss details of the potential deal except to say that delivery of the planes would occur over five years.

The European expansion suggests that privately owned Surf Air has found success while similar private jet businesses have struggled.

Private jet charters Blackjet, Blue Star Jets and Beacon, among others, have ended operations in the last few months, citing funding difficulties as well as problems securing planes, among other issues.

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But Surf Air has almost 3,500 members who pay $1,950 a month to fly among 11 airports in California, plus weekend flights to Las Vegas.

“We are doing very well,” said Jeff Potter, chief executive of Surf Air. “Acceptance of the model has been very, very positive since Day One.”

The advantage of Surf Air is that members don’t wait in line for airport security screening. Passengers don’t fight for elbow room on the plane because each seat is next to a window and an aisle. The fliers are also handed their bags when they exit the plane instead of waiting at the baggage carousel.

If all goes well, Potter said, Surf Air will launch a European branch next year based on the same model.

Simon Talling-Smith, who will head Surf Air’s European branch, said the company will target business travelers who frequently travel between two points in Europe or people who need to fly between two homes.

“Our members will be frequent travelers who value their time,” he said.

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