IS PRIVATE AVIATION MARKETING MISSING SOMETHING?

News / Business aviation, Events / Festivals

By Cdr. Bud Slabbaert

It didn't happen just once that a five start resort in the Caribbean asked me for my advice on finding a private charter for a guest of theirs. I'm not a broker and don't intend to become one. Sure, I have a network of many aviation service providers because of my event organizing activities and I am able to make proper recommendations and provide coordinates to a hotel/resort in question. But then one wonders. Where is the connect between charter brokers and the hospitality industry stakeholders or tourism offices at a destination, that I am the one asked for a recommendation?

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Maybe the broker marketers are too much focused on attracting clients that they already know, which may turn out to be just an assumption. It reminds one of the three categories of knowing:

1. you know;

2. you don't know and find out specifics, or

3. you didn't know what was to be known and missing out on information and opportunities.

It may take some intelligence to figure out the last. It could help to acquire additional revenue, to develop a niche market, or have an edge on the competition.

It is common that aviation conferences are organized and then sponsors are asked for financial support. I some cases, it is like begging. The sponsors clearly think "what's in it for us?" and usually that is just 'exposure'. Certainly, an event should have a neutral format. However, companies are serving the market. Shouldn't they have some input in the format or characteristics of an event? One of the potential sponsors of our event requested to be able to display a helicopter. Normally such would be done at an event partner's airport. I looked into the matter and we are able to offer that the chopper will be displayed on the venue's premises, right at the hotel/resort. What better way to display a seaplane than mooring it at the pier of the venue resort? That is worth more than all the banner's and other hoopla that are usually offered to a sponsor. Does it influence the conference content? No! But it gives the industry a better chance to show of how it serves the market.

When an event climbs up to a position comparable to a rooster in the pen, it often becomes the same 'cock-a-doodle-doo' every event. Maybe event organizers should approach potential sponsors asking what their interests might be and then consider from the beginning of the event planning how the cooperation could enhance the 'power' of an event and create new event features.

No location in the world is more depending on aviation than an archipelago region. I could be the testbed for aviation performance. It is a great location for spectacular aviation photography of business and private aircraft, not to forget helicopters or the drones of the future. At small airports with enormous challenges, it can be shown what an aircraft or aviation product is worth under difficult circumstances. Ever seen a sea-cliff-runway-cliff-sea constellation? And that runway is only 400m/ 1,312ft long.

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Juancho E. Yrausquin Airport (TNCS) is an airport on the Dutch Caribbean island of Saba that has the shortest commercial runway in the world, flanked on one side by high hills, with cliffs that drop into the sea at both ends.

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A landing at St.Barth airport (TFFJ) in the French Caribbean with its 646m/2,119ft runway is like what an Olympian experiences when taking off from a winter sport ski jump; five meters or less above the slope and decreasing until touch-down.

In the past, I became in charge of business aviation development for an airport. The day that I received the assignment, I wondered how the heck am I going to do it? I knew that 101-marketing was not getting anywhere to create significant growth. And so, darnikidi darnikido, I decided to visit the operation center of one of the largest business jet fleets. I didn't go there to make a sales pitch. In a short day, I learned almost in detail about how they operated. Most important of all, I found out about the problems that they have to deal with when flying to various destinations. No sales pitch, but rather my simple but straight-forward question to the head of operations was: "what if we can

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prevent those problems or dilemmas?”. ‘My’ airport was inspected three times and became a preferred airport. Bizav traffic grew significantly. Maybe, it’s just because an old fox knows more tricks to get a rabbit out of a hole than a puppy with a degree.

A straightforward person can create a static discharge in a board room where the members have world class antennas for career or competition dangers. Often the executives believe in and support what I call “Swamp Marketing” for methodically dragging customers into a sale, but no one wants it because it sucks. Marketing is a very complicated skill and communication is the heart of it. Marketing lacking smart strategy is like an artillery battery pointing in all directions, loaded with blanks and firing at will; lots of noise, no hits and it may even backfire.

The four examples may suggest is missing in private or business aviation. The examples may not have wings but nothing flies without communication.

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