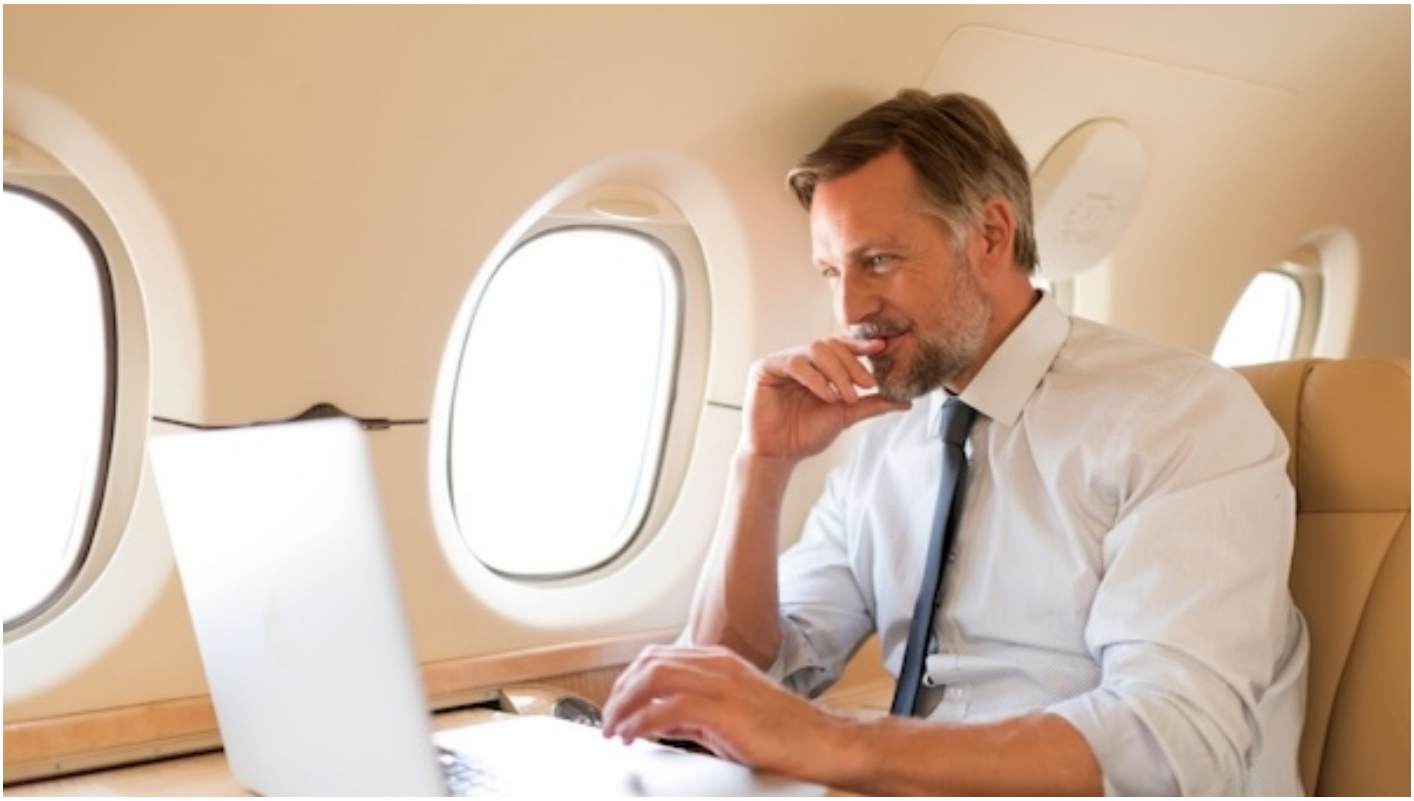
IT TOUCHES YOUR LIVES IN WAYS YOU DON'T REALIZE – VIASAT'S DEBUT AT AERO FRIEDRICHSHAFEN. INTERVIEW WITH JIM MACDOUGALL, HEAD OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT, BUSINESS AVIATION AT VIASAT

News / Business aviation, Events / Festivals, Manufacturer



When it comes to connectivity in business aviation, what are the first words that come to mind? Speed, stability, performance? There are people who don't have a technical background, for whom the numbers are less understandable or less meaningful. How can we measure their level of satisfaction and their needs for connectivity services? To make a long story short—I had the pleasure of discussing all of this with AERO 2026 with Jim MacDougall, Head of Product Management, Business Aviation at Viasat.

T.O. First obvious question: we are currently at AERO Friedrichshafen. Can you share some information as to why people should absolutely not miss you at the event?

J.MacD.: You know, with EBACE being canceled this year, this is going to be the the main opportunity for European customers to visit Viasat in a business aviation context. AERO Friedrichshafen has really turned into quite a large event. And historically, Viasat has not gone to the show. This will be our first year officially there with a stand and it's going to provide us with an opportunity to talk to not only our traditional business aviation customers, but also a lot further into

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the general aviation market. And that's of particular interest to us and we'll probably get into this as we start talking about multi-orbit and products to serve a broader swath of the non-commercial aviation market. We're really excited to to see these customers and meet more potential partners and people that attend.

T.O. You will be a first-time exhibitor. That sounds quite interesting. You mentioned EBACE — were you expecting EBACE to be canceled, and what was the reaction?

J.MacD.: We've always had a very strong presence at EBACE and honestly, that was our focus for Europe. In the past, EBACE has been a phenomenal show with a huge presence of exhibitors and customers, and has really served our goals very well on how to communicate Viasat into the business aviation market.

Over the last few years, EBACE has had some challenges. Last year was valuable, but a much smaller show than in the past. I was hopeful that the show could turn it around, but my understanding is the the exhibitor participation was quite low. They made the decision to cancel for this year.

T.O. You mentioned you are interested in general aviation. Will you go and listen to their needs or how do you plan to get a sense of their expectations?

J.MacD.: Smaller aircraft historically have been underserved by satellite communications generally just because of size. They could maybe put on an L-band system, such as SwiftBroadband but beyond that, their aircraft are just generally not big enough to support a tail-mounted antenna for a GEO satellite. And that's really where the industry was focused on for many, many years, was GEO satellites. And so with LEOs coming to market now it opens up an opportunity for smaller antennas that could fit on these aircraft with a service that would be a great experience for them.

The desire for connectivity is just as strong in these smaller aircraft as it is in the big ones. And they're kind of starving for attention. The market penetration of that part of the market is significantly lower than super-midsize and above. So there's a pretty interesting opportunity. There's a couple products that have come to market here recently that are aimed at serving that. But as Viasat thinks about multi-orbit and we look to leverage our partnership we announced with Telesat last year, this becomes an interesting area of opportunity for us. In part this is the reason I'm going to this show: to chat with some of the OEMs and listen to customers. Certainly Textron, smaller Cessna Aircraft, HondaJet, Pilatus, Daher.

I would love to expand our footprint into additional OEM partners and enter new markets and new relationships. I'll be spending a lot of time walking around the floor,meeting people, and listening. We are at the phase right now of gathering requirements and a kind of wish list. If you could design a system, what would you like? What are your constraints on size, weight, power? What are you looking for in terms of an experience? I think that's important to get that voice of the customer early. I would rather bring them along as part of the journey and design a product that serves their needs and they get excited about.

T.O. : What about traditional business aviation? Are you bringing something new? Are you doing something special?

J.MacD.: We've actually accomplished quite a bit since we were at a European show last year. We'll talk about what our approach will be in terms of the product offerings, being able to combine the benefits of leveraging our very resilient GEO network with the addition of a LEO component.

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We have rolled out new service plans for our JetXP offering. We've added more capacity, we've enhanced network prioritization and uncapped speeds, and we've simplified the plans as well.

Going back to what you said about listening, we had two things that we've done over the last six months. The first was a report in partnership with MIT that looked at the customer experience for in-flight connectivity and how to measure that and show the value. And the result of that report was that the speed is not the best way to do this. We took this report and we rolled out a new concept called iQe, which is intended to measure a number of different factors about the the experience. Finally, we conducted our annual survey with Corporate Jet Investor and the survey results have proven to be interesting in what pilots and principals care about in their connectivity choices and expectations.

T.O.: It is important for someone who's offering services, because you're listening to your client.

J.MacD.: The industry has done a disservice to the customer for 10 or 12 years. We have spent all this time talking about "You're going to have an at home experience," or, "You're going to have an office in the sky" and we made these promises on what this experience would be like, and then we delivered on that promise by saying, "You get 50 megabits per second," or, "You get 20 megabits per second, or 100 megabits per second." But we never translated that into, "What is your experience like at home?".

Customers were left disappointed, and rightfully so. Now, when they hear all of us talk about these great things that are coming, and things have gotten incredibly better, technology has improved: new satellites, new antennas. Everything has gotten phenomenally better. The challenge has been that there's a lot of skepticism. iQe is really meant to show that we mean it, and that we're going to show you that we are meeting your expectations in a way that's easily understandable.

T.O. Do you think there's a big difference between business aviation, general aviation, and commercial aviation needs? Do you think that needs, market, and demands are totally different or are there some similar things?

J.MacD.: I think there's a lot of similarity. The main difference is scale - an average business aviation aircraft might have six passengers on a flight, each with a few devices, versus even a small commercial aircraft could have 100 passengers, It goes up to many hundreds after that. Same types of things, like making sure that that passenger in the seat has that experience they want is important. Making sure the equipment, the terminal is robust and resilient and can deliver the capability that we need to be able to provide that experience to these people in the seat. It’s all the same.

Bigger antennas, more capability, more network resources are needed for these aircraft because they're larger, but it's the same type of problem that we are looking to solve. The scale will be particularly important with commercial aviation now, as more and more airlines are shifting to a free model.

Historically, if you looked at a commercial aviation aircraft that had 300 people on it, the actual uptake rateof people in those seats that picked the connectivity solution was usually quite low. And it was because the experience could be poor and the cost. Do you really want to spend all this money on a ticket and then spend another $20 to have Wi-Fi. The experience has improved, the airlines have now become more comfortable making it available broadly. We’re starting to see more and more airlines offering it for free. They believe in the ecosystem that it can deliver, and it's on us to ensure that we're doing our part to deliver that experience. So all of that experience and

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delivery translates directly into business aviation as well.

T.O. : My last question may be a strange one - many technologies were tested and became real thanks to different investments in business aviation,before going on to serve many other industries. Would you say that your products scaled for business aviation are helping your other products, which are meant for commercial aviation ? As the technology was tested, approved, and you know that it's something with high quality, and you're capable of delivering.

J.MacD.: Companies invest in products all the time, but to develop new ideas and new concepts, and to bring something to market requires a business case, and a business case requires a customer base that's willing to pay. Business aviation has a customer base that is willing to invest and purchase innovative new products. This allows people like us to develop new products and new ideas and see how they work, and have customers willing to try them.

Sometimes products don't work out - there's plenty of examples in history of companies that brought a really cool idea to market and for whatever reason, the market just said, "No." because you missed the mark for whatever reason. That's an important part of innovation too, because you learn from the things that don't work as well as the things that do. The ability to invest in new products, and it's across lots of things, not just connectivity but investing in new products driving an interest, serving a customer, meeting a need is really, really important. Then that technology can translate into many other things. It touches your lives in ways you don't realize, all because of things that we do way upstream.

T.O.: That's very good title. I will use it. People need to hear a very short, easy, understandable thing, and then they realize the importance of the company. That's exactly as you told. It touches your life in a way you can not even imagine in everyday life. Thank you. Looking forward to see you at AERO 2026 !

J.McD.: Thank you and see you soon!

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