

# Providing A-Z support

In a Q&A with World Commerce Review David Briggs-Wilson of Hermes Aviation Consulting discusses how decades of aviation experience results in a smooth path to reaching your travel aims



## Biography

*David Briggs-Wilson was born and brought up in Yorkshire, and after studying mechanical engineering became an engineering officer in the merchant navy. David joined the Royal Air Force and was commissioned as an officer before embarking on his flying training after which he flew on various operational squadrons. Upon retiring from the RAF, David entered a different world of aviation, moving from fast jet fighters to general aviation. David has held various senior positions and has turned his attention to Hermes Aviation Consulting, which was formed to lead the way bringing everyone together for the common good and for the good of the industry.*

## How did HAC come about?

After spending more than 55 years in aviation and almost 40 years in general aviation of which over ten being hands-on running a multi-aircraft management and operating company, I have seen many of the faces, good, bad and indifferent of the aviation industry.

As I was presented the opportunity to start to take a back seat and a well-earned retirement, the prospect of which filled me with dread, I decided that a life of pushing supermarket trolleys through the aisles was not the retirement life I wanted or needed so the seeds of Hermes Aviation Consulting were sown.

The seeds of Hermes Aviation Consulting became obvious prior to its inception from what was a seemingly innocuous remark made by one man during an exploratory business meeting in North London, where it was said *“The pity of it all is that no one really knows about us”*.

It struck a chord with me as he was absolutely spot on target. Here we were discussing the synergies of two different companies, one aviation the other automobile, but each with matching products and clientele, yet no one really knew about them outside their clientele and tight profession. The seeds of Hermes Aviation Consulting were almost ready to be sown.

## What is the role of Hermes Aviation Consulting?

The role of Hermes Aviation Consulting is simple. To provide an A-Z service by providing the link between all the many sectors that are business aviation to assist at every stage of the process, from initial acquisition of an aircraft with all that goes with it, all the way through to the eventual disposition of a business aircraft.

HAC is there to provide support to its clients, whether they be aircraft brokers, buyers, sellers, lawyers, service providers, cabinet and even candlestick makers.

Acquiring a business aircraft is not as simple as walking into a car showroom and choosing the colour and model then waiting for delivery. There are so many steps to be taken and in the right order, and not every player in the sequence knows what needs to come next. HAC is there to provide a seamless link through the whole process or even part of the process. HAC is simply linking in the services that are necessary to achieve the goal of the owner, whether a corporate entity or an individual. HAC performs, if you wish, a form of concierge service.

## What is HAC's background in this?

The background for Hermes Aviation Consulting is the many years of experience Hermes Aviation has had as an operator and management company coupled with the individuals who are the core of Hermes-wide professional business aviation experience. We have all seen from our individual experiences where things can and do go wrong and where, had there been a Hermes Aviation Consulting in those times, we would have used its services to the full, confident in a successful conclusion, from logistics to catering, to soft furnishings to technical assistance in faraway places. Experience is a great background to have, it is not infallible, but it goes a very long way to making a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

We use our knowledge, our experience and our trusted contacts to create a network that is ever expanding that is the very core of Hermes Aviation Consulting.

## How Can Hermes Aviation Consulting assist a client?

I was somewhat taken aback a couple of years ago when discussing the potential sale of our own aircraft with a sales executive of a well-known and reputable aircraft brokerage firm. In our general conversation he was bemoaning the fact that one of the aircraft they were selling required a PPI (Pre-Purchase Inspection), a normal feature of the sales process but, as he told me, he was concerned as no one knew where such an inspection could be carried out.

He was genuinely surprised when I told him that he was sitting in the very premises of the only manufacturer approved and authorised service facility in Europe; he genuinely was totally unaware of the fact but ready to advise

his client to spend tens of thousands of dollars flying to another facility to have the inspection carried out when it could be done on his doorstep.

I have realised over the years that aircraft sales brokers have an important role to play in the aircraft acquisition process, but so few of them take it seriously, being more concerned with closing a sale as quickly as possible and then moving onto the next as soon as their commission payments hits their account.

Where is the follow-on or even the follow-up for the client? Where, for example, he should look for approved maintenance, what legal processes are involved including good (aviation) lawyers who are both efficient and charge reasonable fees.

These are but two simple examples of the myriad of processes and support the client needs to be guided through in a smooth, seamless flowing manner. This is where Hermes Aviation Consulting is the key as we can and do provide not only the information but make the arrangements to introduce the client(s)/customer(s) to the appropriate service provider, one whom we know and trust who adhere to our core principles.

Hermes Aviation Consulting not only provides services to aircraft owners, buyers and sellers but also arranges and works with all parties within HAC's network. So many service providers can benefit from each other with sales leads, product support, product diversity networking.

Hermes Aviation Consulting provides an open networking for both aviation professionals, companies, individuals, sellers, buyer and users in fact all stakeholders in business aviation bringing everything together to meet the needs and aspirations of aircraft owners anywhere in the world.

A simple example of the networking Hermes Aviation Consulting provides is the automobile interior designer providing a useful lead to the aircraft interior designer and refurbisher, as they often have a common customer base. What better way than a client sitting in the customer lounge reflecting on the new interior for his Bentley Continental GT, seeing the photographs of interior designs and furnishings offered by the aircraft interior refurbishers and vice versa? Another spin off to this is both have a common speciality and can work professionally with each other, often providing increased business opportunities.

### What would you describe as being the typical concerns of clients?

Simple: the primary concerns are *"What do I need to do now"*, *"What are my options"*, *"Who should I contact"*. The most common concern, particularly with a first-time buyer for example, is what type of aircraft to purchase and the acquisition costs.

Hermes Aviation Consulting in this case would discuss in detail with the client his or her requirements and his or her usage of the aircraft, and suggest the types and models of aircraft to best suit both budget and requirements. This selection is perhaps the most important of all and to be able to offer a choice of different types and models for the client to select and view.

Then there is the difficult question of finance; how to select the best option for the client from different lenders and assist the client in the process. Organising the viewing, the making of an offer, the legal niceties of an Aircraft Purchase Agreement and, if a pre-owned aircraft, whether it can be re-registered successfully to another aircraft register, which is not always straight forward.

Concerns as to which aircraft registry is best; again, not always evident. Concerns as to legal advice during the sales process and sale closing as bad advice can be very, very costly and difficult to put right.

What options does the client need? He does not need a long list but a carefully chosen detailed short list of targeted options, each one carefully noted explained and identified. Hermes Aviation Consulting can and does provide not only answers to the clients' concerns but also provides the solutions together with the detail, whatever the concern.

### Can you describe how Hermes has helped to solve its clients' problems?

Hermes Aviation Consulting is constantly evolving and providing solutions to problems is not always a necessity, except in extremis, as we try our best to avoid problems arising; it is our role to anticipate possible problems and issues, then to provide suggestions for small changes to be made to avoid the possible pitfall. We try to have the foresight to avoid having to reflect on hindsight; it is better to have progressive management than to have crisis management.

As an example of helping to solve a client's problem, I can look at the following example. A client of ours, an importer and sole concessionaire of prestigious champagne and fine wines, wished to look at expanding into aviation, but how? We know from experience that business aircraft owners enjoy good wines and champagnes both on the ground and in the air. It is not a 'bling' thing but a matter of taste and compliments the whole, the aircraft, the owner, the way of doing business.

First, we contacted the specialist catering companies who provide the food and beverages to and for the business aircraft, together with the FBOs where the aircraft operate from. From this we marketed both HAC and our client providing an opportunity for caterer, HAC, FBO and our client for an evening of wine tasting; this then spun off other ancillary but equally important additions of other upmarket specialist beverage suppliers to participate.

In addition, a bespoke interior soft furnishing designer/supplier to yachts and aircraft has joined in to participate in the evening. Not only have we provided a solution to our original client's problem of entering into the aviation market but also provided a showcase evening for others each one complimentary to the other; it's a win, win benefit solution for all participants. What better problem solving is this?

### How do you see the industry developing?

Business aviation historically runs seemingly in cycles of 7 years. We have had a flat line in business aviation for a number of years now but there are encouraging signs of recovery. New aircraft sales are showing improving signs and the pre-owned market is fairly active. It is now time for the upturn in fortunes for business aviation.

Too often business aviation is maligned in the press; it's the popular thing to do and many journalists in the popular press have scant idea or notions of business aviation and what it provides to the economy of the world in terms of wealth, investment, employment and the ancillary positive effects.

Imagine a town with a large factory employing 70% of the town's adult population. Not only does the factory provide direct employment but also provides full employment to the trades people, shopkeepers, tinsmiths and candlestick makers in the town where the factory employees spend their money. The town council is rich from the con-

tributions paid to it by the factory and the employees who work there; the town is vibrant, it functions, there is life and soul to the place. Now imagine closing the factory down and the economic catastrophe that would bring to the town and to the country as a whole.

Business aviation is that factory in my example, it is not a toy for the rich and famous but a tool. Business leaders are by their very nature important and busy people, as are their senior managers and directors. Their use of a company business aircraft is efficient, effective and an essential tool for the benefit of the company as a whole.

More and more companies are realising that the use of business aircraft is an essential tool in their business plans. Today taking a business trip to an international destination is a daunting affair. Commercial flights may require using an airport a long distance away, the flight times may not be convenient and having to arrive at least 2 hours before departure to clear check-in, immigration and security along with thousands of others is daunting. The flight even in business class does not guarantee that you will arrive fresh and in good fettle for that all-important meeting and the colleagues you need with you are also in the same state as you after the flight.

Yet taking a business aircraft can mean using the nearest airport to your business, with a departure time to suit you not the airline's schedule, with a private check-in, immigration and security on demand means the 2 hours in advance can be as little as 15 minutes. On the flight you are secure, your colleagues and you can spend the whole flight discussing strategy, finance etc and have constant access via the aircraft's WiFi and the internet to collaborators back home.

Met at your destination by dedicated transport, whisked through the FBO terminal customs and immigration in minutes, not hours and on to that important meeting fresh and ready for business. No longer having to look at watches to see when you can wind up the meeting in order to make the commercial airline flight back home as

your business aircraft is as flexible as you and on demand. It is the tool of all tools; this is how I see the industry developing, taking itself out of the image of bling to being that of being the most efficient and effective business tool ever.

## What message do you have to those considering using an aviation consultant?

Simply, look carefully, ask questions, feel comfortable, make sure the consultant has experience in the industry and is independent and has a good reputation.

A good consultant can save you tens of thousands, provide you with suggestions and options for your consideration. He or she should be your guide and hold your hand through whatever process or processes you have. A good consultant will take care of the hassle smoothing the path to ensure you reach your stated aim and goal.

Why wait? Contact Hermes Aviation Consulting. ■

*david@hermes-aviation-consulting.com*

*christopher@hermes-aviation-consulting.com*