

# 'We've got it, and it's on the way'



A few companies ooze confidence and self-assurance when you visit: from well-kept lawns outside its headquarters at Slinfold, West Sussex, to the efficient operation of its warehouse – with an endless stream of aircraft parts packed, labelled, loaded and sent on their way, AJW Group is justifiably a global MRO sector leader. **Glenn Sands** spoke to some of its key players

**T**ime is money', and nowhere is this more apparent than in aviation, with aircraft, airlines and operators all needing to be at a destination on time, every time. While the end product for many is seeing the shiny white airliner at the airport as

they make their way along the walkway to board, few are aware of the many components, parts, repair and supply chain companies providing support to ensure this aircraft operates perfectly.

These companies, often operating in the background, are the backbone of the aviation industry, building their reputation on their ability to respond to the airline's

request for a specific part and deliver it to the other side of the world in the shortest time possible. Their 24-7 dedication to precision and efficiency keeps the aviation industry soaring, and they are not resting on their laurels. Instead, they are embracing new technology, constantly striving to improve and lead the way into the future of aviation. ▶

**MAIN IMAGE:**  
*The impressive headquarters of AJW Group, located in Slinfold, West Sussex, reflects the professionalism and attention to detail that operates at every level within the company*  
All images AJW Group

**INSET:** *Christopher Whiteside, chairman of the AJW Group, a lifelong aviation business professional and entrepreneur*





**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**  
The main warehouse at Slinford, West Sussex

Scott Symington, chief commercial officer drives the AJW Group's sales plan and commercial strategy

Escape slides at AJW Technique's Montreal site

Clyde Buntrock, chief executive officer AJW Aviation and AJW Technique



It's a concept long held by Christopher Whiteside, chairman of the AJW Group. This independent, award-winning MRO company has earned itself a reputation as one of the sector's most trusted and efficient operators, supporting more than 1,000 airlines across 100 countries.

At the core of the company is the belief in establishing a mutually beneficial, trusted partnership with the client. It's a point Whiteside is keen to emphasise: "We have an exceptional reputation in the industry and strive to do our job consistently, practically, reliably and honestly to best serve our global customers best."

He added: "We are continually investing and developing our services, from adding additional capabilities at our MRO facilities in Montréal and West Sussex, forming partnerships with OEMs to drive cost and service efficiencies, and investing in the latest aircraft assets to maintain our reputation for customer service excellence."

"We recently announced the acquisition of a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner and have entered the Airbus A350 support market by acquiring a significant spare parts package. These are strategic moves, and

we are now positioned to support A350 operators and airlines worldwide with many components."

This ability to respond quickly to the sector's needs indicates that Whiteside keenly monitors the operators' future needs. AJW has strategically positioned Airbus A350 spare parts in its various

hubs across Europe and the Americas. "We are poised to provide unparalleled service for the new generation of long-haul aircraft, ensuring efficient maintenance operations across our existing and expanding global A350 customer base with the added support of AJW Technique, our MRO facility in



Montréal," said Whiteside. Investing in its customers' current and future needs has been a cornerstone of AJW's operations. Only by acquiring the latest generation of aircraft will its access to the more significant market demand align with its inventory, which is shifting ever more to modern technology standards.

This constant upgrading has allowed digital technology to become a core strategy within the AJW Group, which has proven to benefit the business and customer, according to Whiteside: "Integrating and embedding digital solutions into our processes, from the outset, has helped drive transformation through innovation while reflecting industry trends sooner."

### **Focusing on people**

The AJW Group has attracted the best and the brightest to join its staff, and all come with a wealth of knowledge and experience that they are keen to develop within the Group across all its divisions. Clyde Buntrock, chief executive officer of AJW Aviation and AJW Technique, joined the company in 2022, having had experience in global supply chain

management and technology. It's that experience that he believes has proven invaluable in his current position, which he admits has provided plenty of challenges and opportunities within the sector. But he is also very much focused on AJW's staff, too.

He said: "My style is to have a relentless focus on people and building high-performing teams, and my success stems not only from my business background, but from my passion for sports. In today's dynamic business environment, I have translated this focus to fostering a positive performance culture that isn't just a strategic move, it's a necessity."

"I firmly believe that our people are the cornerstone of our success, and interpersonal relationships are the bedrock upon which success is built. By nurturing a culture of positivity and continuous improvement, we foster excellence, which, in turn, builds trust and respect. This culture enhances productivity and engagement and contributes to well-being and staff retention."

Continued development of those on the 'shop floor' and the opportunity to create

'high-performance teams' through training have created a robust performance culture across all areas of the Group. Buntrock is keen to point out that "clear communication, trust and collaboration" are areas he looks at every workday and promotes.

The experience that executives bring to AJW has already positively impacted the business's success. After COVID-19, many MRO companies were left struggling and waiting for the commercial aviation demand to return to pre-pandemic levels. Only by having a trained, efficient workforce able to respond when the inevitable surge in demand returned, has kept AJW ahead of its competitors.

Buntrock explained: "By conducting regular performance development reviews we ensure we align individual goals to our strategic business goals. We work on goals from top to bottom, fostering accountability and driving performance. Regular check-ins, clear expectations and peer-to-peer accountability empower our employees to excel, contribute meaningfully to our collective goals and promote our company values."

"Transparency, honesty and open communication channels are





**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:**  
*Louis Mallette, president of AJW Technique*  
*Attention to detail and second-to-none organisation are hallmarks of the AJW Group. The facility in Montreal reflects this*  
*AJW Technique facility, Montreal, Canada*



fundamental to our leadership approach as these principles lay the foundation for long-term growth. We provide ample training opportunities for our people that promote idea generation, knowledge sharing and strategic alignment, fostering a sense of purpose and belonging among our employees to promote a positive company culture.”

**An eye on the future**

No matter how good the team, the aviation industry experiences fluctuations, and the global pandemic demonstrated that it has to be adaptable – a view echoed across the Group that has kept the company within a leading position in the MRO sector.

Scott Symington, chief commercial officer, keeps a firm eye on the future of AJW to ensure any challenges can be met: “The industry has recently experienced a trend in aircraft retention. Faced with delays associated with new-generation platforms like the NEO and the MAX, coupled with the surge in demand post-COVID, operators are holding on to their fleets longer than ever before.

“This prolonged operation necessitates extensive maintenance, presenting

challenges and opportunities for the industry. As a company, we noted the implications of this trend and proactively adjusted our strategies to meet our customers’ needs.

“Central to our approach is the seamless integration of digital solutions into our operations. We’ve streamlined processes through digitisation efforts, enhanced inventory management, and provided real-time visibility into component status and shipment tracking. We are developing automated fulfilment solutions and looking at our first pilot for robotics in our MRO facility in Montréal. These advancements will allow us to respond rapidly to customer needs and optimise our inventory levels and market demand efficiently,” said Symington.

**Global teams**

For any MRO company, managing inventory is a balancing act that requires understanding of patterns and lead times. Symington continued: “We employ priority forecasting and data-driven decision-making to maintain optimal inventory levels while minimising surplus stock holdings. Our procurement strategies encompass diverse channels, each with

risk and reward profiles.” The company strives to balance maximising returns and minimising risk exposure, as is the case with all MRO sectors.

However, having a large inventory is not good enough if it’s all in one location, effectively increasing delivery times and logistics when the request comes in. It’s an issue Symington is keenly aware of: “A large part of inventory strategy involves strategically placing inventory across our global hubs and having well-placed global teams to service our customers in various regions. Over the past couple of years, AJW has expanded its global operations by placing support teams in Turkey and Mexico City to underscore our commitment to offering an international and customer-centric service.

“With additional support from AJW Technique, our MRO facility in North America along with our strategically located global offices and hubs have delivered unparalleled service, priming us to capitalise on emerging regional opportunities.”

But Symington also has eyes on the future, particularly the emerging eVTOL market, which the Group is keen to enter: “We’re embracing innovation and driving

positive change in the industry through our recent partnership with Lilium, a market leader in eVTOL technology. By serving as the exclusive parts distributor for Lilium’s eVTOL jets, we’re supporting ground-breaking technology and championing sustainability within aviation.

“Our strategic alliance with Lilium underscores our belief in the power of collaboration to shape the future of aviation. Together, we’re establishing

efficient material services and distribution channels to ensure the seamless operation of these cutting-edge aircraft worldwide while sharing a commitment to reducing carbon emissions and mitigating the environmental impact that paves the way for a more sustainable aviation industry.”

**Strategic advantage**

Montréal, Canada, is regarded as a critical aerospace hub within the industry and is home to the MRO facility for AJW Technique, which provides an invaluable strategic advantage. It serves as a melting pot of talent and expertise, facilitating collaboration and innovation within the industry. Proximity to other aerospace OEMs allows the Group to stay ahead of the curve, enabling AJW Technique to meet the needs of an ever-evolving market.

AJW Technique Europe, based in West Sussex, UK, specialises in aircraft battery maintenance, boasting a Centre of Excellence dedicated to this critical aspect of aviation. President of AJW Technique, Louis Mallette, believes his ability to speak English, French and Spanish has helped him navigate different cultures and led to success in his role. “Our work here is not without its challenges and opportunities. The resurgence of global passenger traffic over the past two years presents both, particularly regarding our MRO operations.

“Labour shortages continue to be a concern, threatening to impede the anticipated growth in flight schedules and fleet expansion. We’ve recognised the importance of investing in talent development initiatives to address this head-on,” said Mallette.

He also echoed the concerns of Symington: “The industry is seeing the prolonged operation of older aircraft, coupled with supply chain disruptions, underscoring the critical role of component repair activities. At AJW Technique, we anticipate a surge





**RIGHT:**  
*Solar panels on AJW's headquarters in Slinford*

**BELOW:**  
*Barry Swift, chief operational officer, is focused on the strategic improvement of AJW's logistics and warehousing capability*



in repair demand and are committed to operating at maximum capacity to support the growing fleet. By investing in inventory and strategically placing this across our global hubs, we already have proactive measures to mitigate supply chain disruptions and ensure uninterrupted MRO operations.”

### **Robust growth**

With the need to constantly focus on the future, Barry Swift, the chief operational officer, is best placed to comment on how AJW will move forward: “From my perspective, the future for the company is about managing high growth, becoming even more effective and driving further efficiency. We are planning significant growth with an ‘if you build it, they will come’ mentality. It’s about growth at pace, founded on robust and resilient operational capabilities.

“Logistics connectivity and effectiveness are an ever-increasing aspect of MRO, having increased exponentially since COVID-19. Challenges around material availability and lead times drive the need for faster logistics activity.

“AJW recently completed the largest and most comprehensive logistics tender in its history. The tender was, in effect,

a clean-sheet exercise, during which we reviewed all our logistics requirements as if the company were a new start-up.”

Swift added: “This thorough review revealed that while approximately 60% of our existing logistics processes were solid, they required significant refinement and modernisation, including tighter contractual agreements and the adoption of further digital tools for enhanced efficiency.”

AJW has partnered with a new supply chain solutions team to improve logistics, regarded as a strategic step towards consolidating the company’s supply chain management under a digital framework. Swift said: “The tender shed light on the need to reassess certain logistics suppliers that lacked agility or sufficient digital capabilities to meet and manage the Group’s evolving needs and future growth.

“Over the next two years, AJW will introduce a comprehensive digital initiative to boost its logistics capacity by more than 50%. A vital component of this initiative involves the conceptualisation of automated warehouse implementation, a project slated to triple our warehouse capacity within the same timeframe.”

This transformative approach addresses immediate logistical challenges and positions AJW for sustained growth and operational excellence in the future. It’s clear that Swift has a lot on his hands over the next two years, but he remains optimistic about the results: “AJW’s transformation journey is pivotal for our success in today’s dynamic aviation and business environment. By proactively reassessing and revamping our logistics operations, we exemplify the power of adaptation and innovation in staying ahead of the curve.

“The process enables us to address the current challenges effectively and anticipate and prepare for future ones. Moreover, embracing digitalisation and automation enhances our operational efficiency and fosters agility, scalability and resilience – all crucial factors for the Group’s sustained competitiveness – unlocking new avenues of growth and continuing our mission to transform aviation efficiency,” said Swift.

### **A greener planet**

The AJW Group firmly focused on the future of aviation, it’s also aware of the industry’s impact on the environment and the drive to introduce sustainability alongside growth.

The Group has already introduced several practices, as Buntrock explained: “From sourcing eco-friendly materials to adopting sustainable practices in our MRO facilities, we’re committed to minimising our environmental footprint. Whether opting for environmentally friendly cleaning solutions or exploring innovations in materials, sustainability permeates every aspect of our operations.

“We’ve implemented rainwater harvesting systems and solar panels at our eco-friendly headquarters. Our Facilities and Operation teams are spearheading initiatives to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions further, demonstrating our unwavering dedication to environmental awareness.

“The proactive involvement of our global teams underscores our ongoing commitment to a greener planet and positions us as a leader in fostering business sustainability within the aviation sector.”

Mallette supports Buntrock’s comments on greater sustainability. He added: “Sustainability lies at the heart of our business ethos. Central to our sustainability efforts are economical repair activities and responsible end-of-life management. Through repair and recycling processes at all our facilities, we minimise environmental impact while delivering cost-effective solutions to our customers. This commitment aligns with regulatory requirements and enhances our corporate social responsibility profile, positioning us as a preferred MRO partner within the industry.”

AJW Group has a clear path to follow in supporting commercial aviation in all its sectors. A comment from Whiteside best summed up its future: “We’ve come a long way. We have strong foundations and ambitions that will keep us progressing for decades to come.” **AI**