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RESTORE AND SUSTAIN

AJW has been investing in new technologies in its quest to best serve its customers and enhance its position within the industry



Scott Symington, the chief commercial officer at AJW, an independent component parts, repair and supply chain solutions provider for the aviation industry, said that while there have been significant strides toward normality in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, problem areas remain and continue to challenge the sector's full recovery.

On the supply side, the industry is grappling with lower new production rates, longer processing times in maintenance shops and a reduced

availability of spares into the part-out market. On the demand side, delayed production and grounded new aircraft models have increased the need for parts to keep older aircraft operational far beyond their originally planned service life. The delays in aircraft deliveries and issues with in-service new-generation aircraft have intensified these problems. Older generation aircraft that were expected to retire are now being kept in service for longer to meet demand, creating a 'perfect storm' in the industry.

Another significant issue has been

the loss of skilled labour during the pandemic. When the industry shut down, many technicians and workers left aviation for other sectors, which created a labour gap. As the industry has ramped back up, sourcing and training new staff has been a slow process, leading to supply chain delays. This challenge is compounded by raw material shortages and the need to find alternative suppliers, a situation further aggravated by ongoing global unrest. These issues illustrate that, while progress has been made, the aviation industry still faces

considerable obstacles before it's possible to say it has fully recovered from the pandemic.

An agile business

Symington noted that COVID-19 forced businesses to become more agile to survive, and the aviation industry was no exception. As airlines and other stakeholders worked to recover financial losses, they began re-evaluating their entire operations in a bid to improve efficiency and effectiveness. A key trend emerging from this has now been the shift

towards more cost-effective and fuel-efficient aircraft.

Airlines are increasingly incorporating modern, environmentally friendly aircraft such as the Airbus A350 to reduce operational costs and lower their carbon footprints. Sustainability has become a priority across the industry and airlines are actively seeking ways to reduce their environmental impact, which is influencing their purchasing decisions. The emphasis on newer, more efficient aircraft is a direct response to this demand for sustainability.

There is a growing interest in predictive maintenance as airlines recognise the potential of data analytics and digital solutions to enhance aircraft availability and reduce operational costs. Predictive maintenance allows for optimised servicing schedules and fewer disruptions, making it a valuable investment. Additionally, there has been an increased interest in tailored maintenance services. In the MRO market, where the number of significant suppliers is limited, the demand for these solutions is

ABOVE: AJW headquarters in Sainford, West Sussex
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ABOVE: Scott Symington, chief commercial officer of AJW

growing as the market shifts towards greater efficiency and more eco-friendly operations.

Digitalisation is very much part of AJW's core growth strategy and it is working to create value for the business and customers by integrating and embedding digital solutions into its processes to drive transformation through innovation while reflecting industry trends. There is a growing demand for the company's contracted services, particularly within large-scale power-by-the-hour (PBH) agreements. This trend stems from airline operators' requirement for flexibility, agility and customisation to meet specific customer requirements.

Spare parts

One such multi-year contract that went live in July is with Ascend Airways, to support a fleet of Boeing 737 MAX and 737 NG aircraft, including components and MRO services provided by AJW Technique in Montreal. Ascend Airways, part of the Avia Solutions Group family, was established in early 2024 to provide locally based aircraft and crews to meet the needs of UK-based airlines, tour operators, charter brokers,

government departments and NGOs. It is expected to expand by an additional two to five aircraft per year over the duration of the contract.

AJW recently increased its A350 spares inventory by purchasing a package of more than 2,500 components, now located in hubs spread across Europe and North America. By strategically positioning spares in these hubs it is poised to provide unparalleled service for the new generation of long-haul aircraft, ensuring efficient maintenance operations across the existing and expanding global A350 customer base, with the additional support of AJW Technique.

AJW has also invested in the Boeing 787, not least by purchasing a complete GENx-1B-powered 787-9 for its investment portfolio. Having been in long term storage, the aircraft has exceptionally low hours and cycles, and is under a Boeing Continuing Airworthiness Management Organisation (CAMO) storage programme with GCAM at Cotswold Airport in Gloucestershire, with no plans to disassemble it in the immediate future. The MRO is also making heavy investments in



ABOVE: AJW's warehouse at the company's HQ

the Airbus A330 and Boeing 777 via teardowns as narrowbody parts availability is low. This is a strategic move to position itself to support worldwide operators and airlines across a wider range of aircraft types.

As AJW is investing in the needs of customers, it is important to hold inventory that will best serve them. Acquiring the latest generation of aircraft ensures access to a larger market demand that will align the inventory with modern technology standards and secure long-term servicing viability with its global customer base, while at the same time ensuring continued business growth and success.

It is also expanding capabilities at AJW Technique in Europe and driving positive change within the industry through a recent partnership with Lilium, a market leader in electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) technology. By serving as the exclusive parts distributor for Lilium's eVTOL jets, as well as supporting groundbreaking technology it is championing sustainability within aviation. This strategic alliance with Lilium underscores its belief in the power of collaboration to shape the

future of aviation by establishing efficient material services and distribution channels to ensure the seamless operation of these cutting-edge aircraft worldwide, all while sharing a commitment to reducing carbon emissions and mitigating environmental impact.

Customer focus

Symington said AJW's commitment to excellence is deeply rooted in advancing technology and close collaborations with customers to create digital tools tailored to their unique needs. This approach has led to the development of several industry-leading technologies, such as the Inventory Forecasting and Planning Model (IFPM), dynamic live dashboards and a parts tracking tool. For flight hour contracted customers, the IFPM is a gamechanger because this customisable tool uses predictive algorithms to analyse historical and forecasted component usage, along with real time inventory data. It helps anticipate when a part might need to come off-wing, so stock can be pre-positioned in the right global location, ensuring delivery of parts where and when they are needed most.

The IFPM takes this further, offering monthly monitoring, consumption analysis, procurement planning and inventory top-ups. By analysing actual consumption patterns, inventory levels can be refined over time, making sure customers always have what they need. Real time dynamic dashboards offer instant visibility into the status of an aircraft. In an aircraft-on-ground situation, teams can quickly identify the registration number, global location and the necessary steps to get it back in the air quickly.

Another breakthrough has been the GPS tracking tool, which allows customers to monitor high-value shipments in real-time. With features such as estimated time of arrival calculations, dynamic maps and condition alerts, it ensures the proactive management of delays, including re-routing if necessary. Customers can track shipments from any mobile device, with precise delivery confirmations using What3Words technology, which can be critical for deliveries to complex locations such as airports. By harnessing the power of AI and machine learning to drive the creation of automated inventory management

systems, the company can balance risk, efficiency and cost for customers.

Europe

Turning to Europe, Symington said the MRO market is a key global player that benefits from its strategic location and large, established infrastructure. Europe's central position in aviation makes it a vital crossroads for international air traffic, especially long-haul routes. To meet the demand, AJW is opening a European warehouse to provide seamless support to its customers in the region and to mitigate post-Brexit regulations related to imports and exports.


Compared to other regions, the European MRO market is more mature than Asia-Pacific's growing sector and more central to global traffic than North America. High demand for both short-haul and long-haul flights within Europe translates to a steady flow of MRO work, particularly for routine maintenance. Despite these advantages, Symington said the continent must now adapt to maintain its competitive edge as other regions continue to expand and develop their capabilities. ●●●



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