

SIGNATURE SERIES™

Leaders In Private Aviation

Service Excellence

An Interview with William E. Noe,
President and Chief Operating Officer, NetJets Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE *Bill Noe has been Chief Operating Officer of NetJets Inc. since August 2009. Prior to his current position, he served as President of NetJets International Inc. from May 2006. Before that, Noe held the positions of Vice President of Operations, Director of Operations, Captain, and Chief Pilot. He joined NetJets in 1993, and graduated with a B.A. from Marshall University.*



William E. Noe

What is the secret to the ongoing success of NetJets?

It's the people. I have never been around a group of people that are so committed to service excellence. The folks here get excited about taking care of our customers – we call them “our owners” – and that starts with taking care of each other.

What do you look for when you are recruiting?

When we're hiring, outside of meeting the necessary qualifications, we're looking for personality and attitude. These are elements you can't train for. Once we have that, we can educate an individual to be part of the culture we are enhancing. We're a service business – airplanes are just the platform we use to deliver that service.

How have you evolved the fleet, and what will it look like over the next several years?

The NetJets fleets have evolved since inception; we keep our planes for approximately 10 to 15 years, depending on the model type. The airplane that was around when the fractional model first began is no longer part of our fleet. In fact, it's no longer being manufactured.

The ability to make quick changes is tough, so we have to be in front of the trends and try to be aware of what is going to be available three or four years from now. Because of that, our fleet composition is constantly evolving.

We have created a Signature Series aircraft that will only be available for NetJets customers – it is an extraordinary and technologically advanced aircraft that you can't get anywhere else. It is fitted with aircraft noise reduction systems and humidifying systems, as well as mood lighting and a cabin entertainment system that allows the owner to run the whole system from his personal electronic device if he chooses, and more.

The Signature Series airplanes NetJets will offer range from the Phenom 300 in the small-cabin category, to the Bombardier Global Series in the large-cabin fleet, as well as the Cessna Latitude and

Bombardier Challengers. We worked directly with manufactures in order to provide an exclusive NetJets-tailored environment, and the manufacturers we teamed with were incredibly cooperative.

We currently have several of the new Signature Series airplane types operating within our daily flight schedule, but we're still in the development stage on some models. It's important to continue to lead and look ahead, so we're reviewing with the OEMs regularly and making changes that won't come into play until we're further along the delivery line.

Was that a factor in deciding with whom you worked to create the Signature Series?

When we approached the OEMs, a key influencer of our decision was how amenable they were to some of our ideas, because those ideas came specifically from our owners.

NetJets is a leader in fractional ownership, but do you offer a broader range of solutions?

We offer a full menu. If it involves private aviation, we can provide it.

Before NetJets handled fractional, we were a charter company. So NetJets never lost that commercial air carrier certificate, even though it wasn't required to be a fractional operator at the inception of fractional programs. Fractional wasn't regulated until the late-'90s. We maintained that certificate, and built upon the safety standard that was required and regulated. This was an impactful differentiator as we developed the launching platform for NetJets – it was one of many ways to declare that our safety bar was at such a high level that no one else could touch it. We continue to push that bar higher and higher. We owe it to our owners and customers. This is our continued commitment.

Our focus is always on the safety culture, and we continue to foster it as it allows us to deliver a service we are all proud to call NetJets. Over the years, we expanded upon that. We took a regulatory compliant-plus approach, and took it to levels that no one else could consider.

However, the NetJets program itself was, and still is, a fractional ownership one. This means that our customers own an undivided interest in a particular airplane. We will not take your asset and charter it to the public market, as we take the management of our owners assets very seriously.

In the mid-'80s, we realized that if more than one of the owners of an airplane wanted to fly on a given day, we wouldn't have enough airplanes.

To resolve that, we bought a charter company, which not only gave us the planes we needed but also provided a product for those who didn't want to invest in an ownership share, but instead just wanted to charter.

Later, we created a Jet Card program for customers that were interested in buying a block of hours. The NetJets card program has benefits that create a quasi-ownership position, and allow access to the entire NetJets fleet.

We also offer a lease product.

So we have a fractional ownership product, a lease product, a card product, and a charter product. But if you want to just buy your own airplane and own it outright, yet don't want to deal with managing it, we'll manage it for you as well.

Is it tough to cut through the clutter in the marketplace and differentiate yourself?

Most NetJets' customers say they're with us because of our safety standards and high-end service quality.

Just about every aviation company says it's safe, but they don't go into detail substantiating why and how that's the case. Some may assume an operator is safe simply by checking accident records, which is not the way to gauge safety. A lot of experts can come along after an accident and explain why it happened; it's our job at NetJets to proactively prevent that from happening in the first place. Every NetJets team member possesses this attitude. NetJets was the first fractional program to enter Level IV, the highest level of the FAA Safety Management System program. It is a complete and all-encompassing approach to safety. It's really no surprise that NetJets was yet again leading the industry; it's what we stand for.

Also, NetJets doesn't even consider hiring a pilot with less than 2,500 total flight time hours (actuals are significantly higher) with a multi-engine ATP, and FAA first class medical. This is the minimum requirement to be considered.

Are your pilots experts in their particular aircraft?

Yes, and they train twice a year on that aircraft, as a crew; the emphasis we put on standard operating procedures (SOP's) is extremely important to us.

As a result, on the rare occasions when we have had an in-flight issue, the debrief we receive from our owners who experience it state that, while it may have raised their anxiety a little, the NetJets flight crew did a phenomenal job. ●